

Outward Looking Eyes

Visions of Schooling, Development and the State in Nepal



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Declaration

I certify that this thesis has been composed by myself from the results of my own work, except where stated otherwise, and has not been submitted for any previous application for a degree.

Martha Caddell
May 2002

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Abstract

Outward Looking Eyes: Visions of Schooling, Development and the State in Nepal

This study explores the relationship between global discourses of education and development, how those ideas are taken up and utilised in the context of national programme development and implementation, and their further reinterpretation by groups at the district and school level. I engage in an examination of development as a socio-political process in order to explore critically the tensions and paradoxes evident in the promotion of schooling in contemporary Nepal. In doing so, I challenge the depoliticised vision of schooling which underpins dominant donor discourses of education reform and highlight the political and contested nature of education administration and the everyday activities in school.

I take as my starting point Nepal's Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP), a multi-donor initiative aiming to improve access to schooling, the quality of education provision and the efficiency of education administration. Developed in line with the goals of the World Conference on Education for All, the initiative starts from the assumption that the various parties involved - donors, central government officials, District Education Office staff, teachers and parents - share a common interest in and commitment to the promotion of schooling. As such, schooling is considered a clear development 'good' and the state viewed as a single entity, acting as a benign provider of this service.

Through an exploration of the context into which this programme is inserted, the limitations of this dominant consensus-based model are considered. Particular focus is given to the multiple interests played out in the arena of education reform challenging the assumption of shared interests in expanding schooling opportunities. The study traverses from debates between the various donor and central government officials in Kathmandu, through the implementation of the process of District Education Planning, to an examination of the everyday practices of school life and the direct, and often violent, challenges made to the state through schools. At each level, the conflicts of interest and multiple views of the relationship between schooling, development and the state in Nepal are highlighted, challenging the idea that a consensus exists around the content and purpose of schooling. Such an analysis creates an opportunity for a more critical examination of perceptions of schooling and the link between education and development and, as such, has implications for how development practitioners view their role in processes of education reform in Nepal.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ANNFSU(R)	All Nepal National Free Students Union (Revolutionary)
ANWO(R)	All Nepal Women's Organisation (Revolutionary)
BPE	Basic and Primary Education
BPE/DU	Basic and Primary Education Development Unit
BPEP	Basic and Primary Education Project
BPEP II	Basic and Primary Education Programme Phase II
CDC	Curriculum Development Centre
CERID	Research Centre for Education, Innovation and Development
CIP	Core Investment Plan
CLPN	Community Literacy Project Nepal
CPN(Maoist)	Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
CPN(UML)	Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist)
DANIDA	Danish Agency for Development Assistance
DDC	District Development Committee
DEC	District Education Committee
DEO	District Education Office / Officer
DEP	District Education Planning
DFID	Department for International Development (U.K.)
DOE	Department of Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EFA	Education For All
EU	European Union
GIS	Geographic Information System
GTZ	German Agency for Technical Cooperation
HMG	His Majesty's Government of Nepal
IDA	International Development Association
ILP	Institutional Linkages Programme
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KRY	Kirat Rai Yayokha
KYC	Kirat Yakthung Chumlung
LGP	Local Governance Project
LSGA	Local Self Governance Act
MNO	Mongol National Organisation
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MPT	Master Plan Team
NC	Nepali Congress Party
NDS	National Development Service
NEC	National Education Commission
NEFEN	Nepal Federation of Nationalities
NEPC	National Education Planning Commission
NESAC	Nepal South Asia Centre
NESP	National Education System Plan
NFE	Non Formal Education
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation

NPC	National Planning Commission
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PC	Project Coordinator
PEP	Primary Education Project
PIP	Program Implementation Plan
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PROAP	Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RED	Regional Education Directorate
RP	Resource Person
SEP	Secondary Education Project
SEDP	Secondary Education Development Project
SIP	School Improvement Plan
SLC	School Leaving Certificate
SMC	School Management Committee
SPW	Student Partnership Worldwide
SSDP	Sub Sector Development Programme
TA	Technical Assistance
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USOM	United States Overseas Mission
VDC	Village Development Committee
VEC	Village Education Committee
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
WCEFA	World Conference on Education for All
WHO	World Health Organisation

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Introduction

Visioning Schooling, Development and the Nepali State

"Today the 25th Education Day is being celebrated throughout the Kingdom", announced Radio Nepal News. The Prime Minister, it was reported, had stressed that "education is essential for the development of the nation" and that the "values of democratic education" need to be developed to promote "employment, development and humanity". As part of the celebrations, I had been invited to be the Chief Guest at a boarding school's Education Day event — a quiz competition. At the school, students, in their uniforms of blue trousers or skirts, white shirts and blue ties, were sitting on benches placed in the open ground opposite the school, as the teachers organised the teams and the scoring system. Younger kids ran around and played skipping games, until older children or teachers hit them with sticks or pulled their ears to try to make them sit down. A blackboard was used as a scoreboard with the names of the school 'houses' — Annapurna, Kanchenjunga, Makalu and Sagarmatha (the names of Himalayan mountains) — written, in English, along the top. Portraits of the King and Queen¹ were propped up on a chair in front of the group. As part of the opening ceremony, the School Chairman, myself, the Principal and a number of students placed tikka (red-coloured powder) on the photos and sprinkled flower petals over them. Speeches were given in both Nepali and English, focusing on how education was 'crucial for development' and how the developed countries like Japan, America, Britain and France all had good education, so Nepal too must allow all children access to school. The quiz itself finally began, with children asked questions in English, usually based on material from school textbooks. The focus of many questions was on the Nepali nation — "What is the area of our country?", "Who is the father of the nation?" and "Who was the founder of the nation?" Other themes were particularly concerned with markers of material development, with questions asked about the colour of traffic lights and zebra crossings. As few of the children from this village had seen a road, let alone road markings or traffic lights, the knowledge this was based on was the result of memorising, rather than any direct experience. At the end of the event I presented the participants with prizes and was in turn given a bottle of Coke, as opposed to the tea others were drinking (f/n:24/2/00, see Photograph 1).

¹ Fieldwork was conducted prior to the Royal massacre of June 2001 when King Birendra and other senior members of the Royal Family were apparently gunned down by Crown Prince Dipendra. References to the monarchy in this thesis refer to the (now late) King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya, unless otherwise stated.

The events of Education Day graphically depict the strong intertwining of discourses of education, development and the state which inform everyday experiences and perceptions of schooling in Nepal. Participation in schooling is constructed as a marker of greater development, a connection with something 'other' to the locality, a point emphasised by the references to countries considered to be more developed as well as by my own invitation to attend the event. The school is also, as these events highlight, a site in which the role of the state as a key provider of development opportunities is promoted and an institution which, in itself, has become a symbol of Nepal's development efforts. Indeed, Education Day is a state-sponsored event, designed to highlight the efforts being made by the central government to advance educational attainment in the country and to boost national development. The school is thus a site where "children are taught to become citizens" (Wilson 2002:313) and to engage with activities promoted by the Kathmandu authorities.

Such a vision of schooling resonates strongly with currently dominant donor discourses of education and development, which present the school as a locus of positive socio-economic change and the state as the primary provider of this service to the population (e.g. WCEFA 1990, UNICEF 1999). The interest in promoting 'Education for All', for example, has assumed an almost hegemonic position in the arena of international aid to education, with the expansion of schooling opportunities regarded as offering a route to increased social and economic development. Yet, if the events of Education Day are explored more closely, a further dimension to the experience of schooling becomes apparent. Far from offering a benign vision of development and the Nepali state, a highly partial position is presented through schools. The intertwining of visions of the nation with discourses of development and societal progress serves to reinforce and legitimate highly particular constructions of Nepali identity and the nation-state, with the culture and lifestyle of certain groups utilised as the aspirational models for all. Thus the school serves both as a new marker of inequality — between the educated and uneducated, the developed and less developed — and to entrench further existing hierarchical relations and differentials in influence and opportunity. The school is not simply an institution through which the state advocates and delivers development opportunities to the populace, but a site within which what it means to be 'developed', and even what constitutes 'Nepal', is promoted and contested.

Exploring Discourse and Practice: The Scope of the Study

The aim of this study is to explore how global discourses of education and development are taken up and utilised in the context of national programme development and implementation,

and the way these ideas are further reinterpreted by groups at the district and school level. I engage in a study not simply of the activities of the development 'industry', but of development as a broader "cultural, economic and political process" (Grillo 1997: 2), in order to explore the tensions and paradoxes evident in the promotion of schooling in contemporary Nepal. In doing so, I challenge the depoliticised vision of schooling which underpins dominant donor discourses of education reform and highlight the contested nature both of education administration and the everyday activities of the school.

I take as my starting point Nepal's Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP), a multi-donor initiative aimed at improving access to schooling, the quality of education provision and the efficiency of education administration. Developed in line with the goals of the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA 1990), the initiative starts from the assumption that the various parties involved — donors, central government officials, district education office staff, teachers and parents — share a common interest in, and commitment to, the promotion of schooling. As such, schooling is considered a clear development 'good' and the state is viewed as a single entity, acting as a benign provider of this service to the population.

Through an exploration of the context into which this programme is inserted and the way in which it is operationalised, the limitations of this dominant consensus-based model are considered. In particular, highlighting the multiple interests played out in the arena of education reform challenges the assumption of shared interests in expanding schooling opportunities. The study traverses from debates among the various donor and central government officials in Kathmandu, through the implementation of the process of District Education Planning, to an examination of the everyday practices of school life and the direct, and often violent, challenges made to the state through schools. At each level, the conflicts of interest and multiple views of the relationship between schooling, development and the Nepali state will be highlighted, challenging the idea that a consensus exists around the content and purpose of schooling. Such an analysis creates an opportunity for a more critical examination of perceptions of schooling and the link between education and development and, as such, has implications for how development practitioners view their role in the process of education reform in the Nepali context.

While I begin with an examination of the implementation of a programme in a particular context, I am not setting out simply to contrast policy rhetoric with practice 'on the ground'.

Rather, I seek to explore the intertwining of global discourses of development and education and the role of the state with the interests and concerns of groups located within the multiple layers of the education system. While discussions of education, development and the state are strongly interlinked and widely utilised from the level of global development debates to perceptions of schooling at the local level, it will become apparent that this does not represent a unified discourse or a consensus position around the content or delivery of schooling. Rather than there being one language of education and development, what emerges through this study is a network of multiple dialects of the relationship between schooling, development and the state. Understanding these competing viewpoints calls into question current practices of donor agencies seeking to promote participation in reform on the basis of a shared vision of the benefits of schooling. In doing so, it challenges them to re-imagine their own role in these processes and reconfigure the questions which guide intervention.

Outlining the Thesis

As a multi-layered study, the thesis explores the relationship between the school, the state and development from a number of perspectives and is thus presented as a journey from the level of international discourse, through to national level programme development and district and school level experiences of education reform. After providing an overview of the actual process of conducting the study in Chapter 1, I situate the research in a historical context, through an exploration of the development of a national education system in Nepal and the influence of both internal and external influence on this reform in Chapter 2. This leads into a discussion of contemporary influences on education reform, beginning in Chapter 3 with a study of currently dominant global discourses on education and the role of the state. Chapters 4 and 5 focus more explicitly on Nepal's Basic and Primary Education Programme, exploring the multiple interpretations of the programme and conflicts of interest evident at the national and district level respectively.

I then broaden the discussion to explore dimensions of the experience of schooling given limited attention in the BPEP programme, with the national and highly political nature of the school explored in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 then highlights challenges made to the hegemonic and highly partial vision of the Nepali state presented in schools, through a study of how ethnic activists, religious organisations and the Maoist movement have utilised schools as a site through which to contest particular aspects of the Nepali state. My concluding discussion focuses on two distinct, yet interlinked, concerns which emerge from the Nepal

study. Firstly, the implications the recognition of conflicting views of education reform have for external agencies involved in aid programming. And, secondly, the importance of understanding the pervasiveness of discourses of development and the need to explore the meanings attached to the rhetoric and practice of development in particular contexts.

I begin, however, by introducing the various layers of the research through an exploration of the actual practice of conducting fieldwork in multiple sites.

Chapter 1

From the World Bank to the Banks of the Tamor River: Conducting Multi-Sited Ethnographic Research

Along the Tamor

The day started at 7am when I met Ganga [a school supervisor] in the bus park and we began the journey down to the floor of the Tamor Valley, where we were to make inspection visits to two primary schools. It was a rather unsettling drive, with the bus careering round the tight bends, Nepali film music blaring from the speakers and chickens squawking as their baskets slid from one side of the bus to the other. From the road it was a one and a half hour walk along a narrow trail, fairly treacherous in places, that wound its way along a steep cliff above the river. There were several small landslides to be negotiated and a couple of points that involved a scramble around rocks jutting out over the river. As we walked to the schools, we discussed our families and work and asked each other the English or Nepali names of various plants that we saw. Ganga also attempted to teach me some of the 'national songs' that were sung in schools, to while away the time on the trail. Questions were also asked about my work and who I had been meeting with. Ganga was particularly interested in how good I considered other people's English to be, gauging her own language skills against those of other district officials and school head teachers. As the day went on, she also shared with me stories about the District Education Office and schools in the area and explained the change in relations between officials which resulted from the transfer of a key employee at the District Education Office... (f/n: 22/10/00).

An Appointment at the World Bank

I was early for the meeting so I sat for a while in the lobby of the Yak and Yeti hotel before going along the corridor to the World Bank offices. I filled my name out in the visitor book and was given a badge and ushered into the lift. I was struck, as I had been on previous visits, by the whiteness of everything. It felt incredibly clinical after the dust and noise of my journey across town. The whiteness was only broken by a couple of poster boards displaying quotes from James Wolfensohn on the need to address poverty, and a series of small framed photographs of Nepali women and children. During the meeting [with the Education Advisor] we drank black coffee, in contrast to the tea normally offered in homes and in government offices, and discussed both BPEP and how the Bank's policies were being

implemented in Nepal in more general. Towards the end of the discussion, just as I was about to pack my notebook into my bag, the Advisor sat back in his chair. "So", he said, "you've been in Nepal for over a year now. What are your main recommendations for improved education decentralisation?" While I had expected this, I didn't feel at all comfortable with the question. I explained that, while I didn't feel I was in a position to make concrete policy recommendations, there did appear to be key issues emerging from my research that deserved greater consideration by the policy community ... (f/n: 18/12/00).

Introduction

The process of conducting fieldwork in Nepal between August 1999 and December 2000 took me to diverse locations and saw me interacting in strikingly different ways with people in each context. The above examples, taken from my fieldnotes, provide a useful starting point from which to explore the complexity of conducting multi-layered, multi-sited research. They also help highlight the importance of engaging in such a research journey if the intricacies of policy implementation and the meanings attached to particular initiatives by individuals and groups are to be fully captured. Through this chapter I wish to provide a practical overview of how I actually went about planning my study, conducting fieldwork and writing up the research, and to engage more critically and reflexively with a number of key methodological concerns which emerged during the course of my research. In doing so I do not wish to give the impression that these concerns were resolved; rather I hope to highlight the constraints placed on my research and how the path taken impacted on the focus of my study and the findings which emerged from it.

As I have indicated previously, the focus of my study is not a specific place or even a single organisation, but rather the interactions between individuals and groups at multiple levels. I am interested particularly in exploring the relationship between trends in global education and development discourse and how these ideas are taken up and utilised at the national policy level and in specific district and school level contexts. In doing so I hope to move away from a dichotomous view of the planners and recipients of aid and of project 'success' and 'failure' towards a more nuanced understanding of how discourses of development and education are adopted and utilised by groups in various contexts. I attempt to examine how individuals and groups adapt dominant discourses of development to advance their own interests and to place themselves at the centre of development relationships. My research interest thus required a methodological approach which allowed a high degree of flexibility and the scope to explore emerging interests. I therefore wished to adopt an approach which

would allow in-depth, sustained involvement with groups of people at various levels of the education administration in order to explore how discourses had been taken up and used in the daily activities of policy-makers, district offices and schools.

As the contrasting extracts which began this chapter illustrate, the process of conducting this study led me to engage in a range of different types of interaction, from more formalised semi-structured interviewing to less directive periods of discussion and observation in schools and government offices. How I was perceived by actors at the various levels directly impacted on the tone of the interactions and the type of approach I could take: the World Bank official clearly placed me in the same bracket as a visiting consultant, assuming my research to have immediate practical implications. As he was used to engaging with foreign consultants and donor representatives and the organisation functioned in a timetabled, streamlined manner, meetings were planned in advance, were relatively formal and concise in nature and were conducted in English. In contrast, the mode of operation in schools and the district level administration was somewhat different, with the planning of meetings in advance proving difficult and Nepali being the main medium through which interviews were conducted. I would, in these contexts, simply turn up at offices and ask to speak to the relevant officials, an opportunistic approach which proved useful as it allowed me to spend considerable and sustained periods of time talking to office workers, teachers and Resource People (RPs)¹ who would not necessarily be the subject of more formally organised meetings.

In addition, some days of the Nepal-based period of the research were spent 'just living', spending time with the families whose homes I stayed in, taking part in community events and sitting on doorsteps or in teashops talking to people, listening to conversations and watching interactions. At times I worried if I was actually 'doing research', with days passing when I did not formally hold discussions with anyone and did not even visit schools. Yet the wealth of data and the gradually deepening understanding of interactions and relationships which I developed as a result of going for meals with people in the community, attending a *mela* (carnival) or shopping and socialising at the weekly vegetable market highlighted the importance of this type of approach. Indeed, as the first extract lays testimony to, being able to spend a sustained period of time building relationships with the

¹ Resource People were introduced as part of the BPEP structure, providing the main link between the school and the District Education Office. They perform supervisory tasks, commenting on teacher performance and the quality of the school environment, and are a key link in the training delivery chain, passing information on new approaches to teaching and management from the central level to the schools.

various actors and moving away from a straightforward informant / researcher relationship, allowed a greater two-way understanding to develop. Over time this led to more detailed discussions and the emergence of what can be considered more 'hidden transcripts' (Scott 1990), a recognition of practices, such as informal decision-making processes, that strongly influence the course of events but which are often only tacitly acknowledged. The impact of political positioning on relationships among DEO officials and school staff, the tensions between donor agencies and the informal transactions and mechanisms through which decisions about school registration and teacher appointment were made are issues which were unlikely to have emerged during a one-off semi-structured interview. By spending time with individuals and revisiting offices and schools I gradually developed stronger relations with key individuals and, as they became more comfortable with my role as researcher, was able to ask more probing and potentially sensitive questions. However, given the multiple layers of the study, involving shifts in physical space as well as shifts in style of engagement, this depth of understanding had to be reconciled with my interest in interactions and communication across a breadth of locations. This tension, between different field sites, between different expectations of me as a researcher and between different methodological approaches emerged as a key element of my experience of conducting this study. This is thus a crucial area to be explored if the research findings, the discussions which follow this chapter, are to be contextualised.

There is a tendency in preparing a 'methodology chapter' to present a picture of a coherent research agenda which led directly to the collection of a discrete set of data from which the thesis was formed. Here, however, I wish to address more explicitly the emerging nature of my work, how my interests shifted in their focus as my understanding of the context deepened, how my intellectual concerns evolved, and how social and political events arose which diverted the planned trajectory of the research. At various stages in the study pragmatic, and even opportunistic, decisions were taken on the basis of practical and personal, as well as academically focused, concerns. These concerns should not be downplayed. They must be acknowledged as having made the study what it is, both in terms of the sites chosen and the approach taken. Gupta and Ferguson (1997) express surprise at how field sites are often depicted in anthropology as having been discovered by chance, by some serendipitous twist of events, a culturally sanctioned discourse which prevents "any systematic inquiry into how those field sites came to be good places for doing fieldwork in the first instance" (1997:11). In light of such critique, I feel it is imperative to firmly situate myself in the research, to highlight how my own predilections and concerns (both

intellectual and in terms of personal safety and comfort) influenced where and how the study was conducted.

Emerging Research Interests

Before turning to an exploration of the multiple sites of the study, which entailed a spatial journey to a number of locations, I wish to explore briefly the intellectual journey taken, the progress of the research down routes not wholly envisaged at the outset. The continual reconfiguring and renegotiating of the emphasis of the project arose from the need to adapt the study in line with events in Nepal and to address key concerns which consequently emerged as central to the understanding of the context. Most notably, the need to foreground multiple representations of the state emerged, an issue which had a less central role in the study I had initially envisaged. A brief overview of the intellectual path taken through the research project illustrates this trajectory and highlights the key events influencing the focus of the study.

The starting point of the study was my own interest in furthering my understanding of global discourses on schooling and development and the impact of large-scale education initiatives on change at the local level. During my undergraduate degree I made a brief visit to Nepal as part of my dissertation research and had my first contact with the Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP) in Kathmandu and my initial experience of schooling both in Kathmandu and outside the Kathmandu Valley, in this case in the western *terrai*. The limited nature of this study raised more questions than it answered so, when the opportunity arose to pursue Masters research on a similar theme (Caddell 1998), I returned for another short period of research in Nepal, this time confined to the world of donor and government interactions in Kathmandu. During this period I focused on the rhetoric of partnership which was gaining increased currency in the discourse of development agencies (e.g. DFID 1997, Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1998, King & Caddell (eds.)1998) and its practical application in the form of the multi-donor, sub-sectoral approach taken to the planning and implementation of the Basic and Primary Education Programme Phase II (BPEP II).

Embarking on the PhD study saw me draw on my previous experience and knowledge base, with my guiding interest being the relationship between policy and practice and, specifically, how partnership and participation debates translate into shifts in working style at district and school levels. I initially focused on how the Education For All rhetoric (WCEFA 1990) was utilised at national and sub-national levels and, in particular, how social 'diversity' was

incorporated into planning and practice. However, as I progressed through the study, additional concerns emerged which influenced the end texture of the argument.

On arrival in Nepal in August 1999, I became aware of a key piece of legislation that was at the centre of much discussion among policy makers and donors and, as I later discovered, politicians and officials at the district and village level. The Local Self Governance Act (2055)² (Ministry of Law and Justice 1999), with its calls for more decentralised planning and greater powers of decision-making to be passed to the district and local tiers of government, created considerable tension between the central administration and local government bodies. This legislation was highly topical and was of immediate concern to many of the people I spoke to during my first few months of Nepal-based research. Consequently, framing my interests around the issue of decentralisation more generally, and the impact of the Local Self Governance Act in particular, offered a useful entry route into key debates, as well as being an important issue in itself.³ Discussing issues which were of immediate concern to the parties involved and examining the conflicts of interest and interpretation which developed helped me explore the existing lines of communication and influence and situate the BPEP initiative firmly in the context of wider political debates and visions of the role of external development agencies. In addition, to tell people I was looking at “decentralisation of education” became a quick catch-all description of my work which could then lead me into more specific discussions as the opportunities arose.

The direction of my research was also significantly influenced by the growing impact of the Maoist insurgency both in the country as a whole and in my specific study area, the eastern hill district of Dhankuta (see Figure 1). Since 1996, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) has been waging an increasingly violent, underground campaign in an attempt to overthrow

² The Nepali calendar, based on a lunar cycle, is 57 years ahead of the Gregorian calendar, with new year falling in the month of Baisakh (mid April).

³ The Local Self Governance Act contradicted over 30 other pieces of legislation, including the Education Regulations. See Nepal Centre for Contemporary Studies (1998) for discussions of the impact of the LSGA. Shrestha (2000) discusses the impact of the LSGA on education in Lalitpur District. These disputes provided a useful route into discussing communication between the multiple layers of the system and a way of understanding how people adapted dominant discourses to advance their own interests. Donor agencies tended to represent the new legislation as a move made by the government to promote greater participation and strengthen democracy within the country. Several government officials, however, regarded the legislation as a donor-led initiative, citing the DANIDA funded Decentralisation Advisory Support Unit and the UNDP's Local Governance Project as the most prominent proponents of the new Act. This view of decentralisation as a donor project was strongly reinforced at the district level: one District Development Committee (DDC) official informed me that the donors now wanted to bypass the central level government and work directly with the district authorities and expressed his hope that DFID would now support the DDC's activities directly.

the constitutional monarchy and introduce a communist republic. At the outset of my research there was considerable Maoist activity in the districts of west Nepal, but the east of the country was considered relatively safe. However, over the course of the study, the picture changed, with the popular perception shifting from “not in the east” to “well, in the east, but not in Dhankuta”, then “in Dhankuta, but not in the bazaar area” until, in the last few weeks of my study, the Maoists began to demand money from wealthy shop owners and teachers in the main town and a number of people, predominantly activists from the ruling Nepali Congress Party, have subsequently been attacked or killed. The growing Maoist presence, coupled with the increased focus on schools as targets of attacks, drew this issue firmly into the sphere of my research, with the issue of the contested nature of the relationship between schooling, the nation-state and visions of appropriate development brought into stark relief.

The research project as a whole, and the field work specifically, was entered into from an explicitly exploratory perspective, with a relatively open-ended, flexible and reflexive approach taken to the collection of data and the focus of the study. From an initial guiding framework of a policy-practice comparison the study moved into a more nuanced exploration of contested views of the relationship between school, state and ideas about development. Planning and research design was thus not a one-off activity, but an on-going process that fed into, and was in turn affected by, actions and interactions at all stages of the development of the project. Such a dynamic research process allowed key concerns to emerge as the study progressed and enabled a framework for understanding events to grow from those events themselves, in tandem with my own shifting research interests.

The ‘Field(s)’ of the Research: Diverse Locations and Multiple Methods

The focus was thus not on a particular group or locale as envisaged in archetypal ethnographic studies.⁴ The focus on ‘the local’, in particular the ‘village’, which has tended to act as the model focal point for anthropological investigation (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 15-16), and the commensurate image of the fieldworker as the single white male living among the ‘natives’ in a village for an extended period (Stocking 1992) did not, then, provide a particularly instructive framework for my research. Rather, the substantive focus of my study — the planning and implementation of an initiative aiming to improve schooling provision — required an approach which traversed multiple layers and allowed a picture of

the interconnections between groups and their appropriation of ideas to be developed.⁵ Being situated in different locations and engaging in interactions in diverse contexts⁶ required me to draw on a broad 'tool kit' of research methods, often adapting my approach and adopting new strategies as particular opportunities to pursue my research emerged or were, at times, foreclosed. So where, then, did I go, who did I meet and what did I actually do?

The 'Field' of International Development Discourses

The first layer of my fieldwork was located not in a physical space, but in the texts and discursive practices of international development organisations, the external support agencies providing financial and technical assistance to 'developing countries'. In particular, the rhetoric and debate arising from the World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien in 1990, and the follow-up meetings in Amman in 1996 and Dakar in 2000 provided an entry point from which to explore the dominant visions of the links between education and development. I examined documents in the public domain and the 'grey literature' related to Education For All efforts at the global and national level, both for their explicit content and as part of an exploration of the rhetoric and underlying assumptions which inform the work of international donor agencies. This offers a route into an exploration of inclusion and exclusion in development practices (c.f. Escobar 1995).

What is under investigation is not in any sense a monolithic 'development discourse'. Rather, the study explores how a multiplicity of voices engage with and adapt ideas of relative development, particularly with those visions which have reached the status of near hegemony within development texts and practices (Grillo 1997). The substantive content and the conflicting views of development even among leading international agencies are

⁴ As Gupta and Ferguson note, an archetype functions "not by claiming to be accurate and literal descriptions of things as they are, but by offering a compelling glimpse of things as they should be, at their purest and most essential" (1997: 11).

⁵ The work of Justice (1986), Crewe (1993), Harrison (1995), Crewe and Harrison (1998), Ferguson (1994) proved to be particularly useful in developing a framework for this research, highlighting the potential that exists to tackle the complexity of a multi-layered study that allows the linkages between policies and practices at different levels to be explored. I also gained valuable insights from work which considered the interface between different 'knowledges' and visions of development (e.g. Arce & Long 1991).

⁶ The distinction between location, or place and context is important to draw. Activities within a particular place vary depending on the people present or the activity being performed (c.f. Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 52, following Goffman 1963). In terms of my own research the interview or discussion context was often altered by such seemingly minor issues such as the clothes I wore, the language spoken and whether I was alone or with my research assistant, issues which are explored further below.

explored through the analysis of texts and consideration of how particular constructions of 'developing countries' emerge in education and development literature. I am especially concerned with the vision of the Nepali state constructed in country reports and programme documents, which are then used as a basis for intervention. In doing so, it is not only the external construction of the state that I am concerned with, but also how Nepal is presented and re-presented by groups within the country.

In addition to development texts themselves — the policy documents, Aide Memoires, reviews and evaluation studies continually produced by agencies and projects — the discursive practices of these agencies were also of key concern to the study. How the discourses were adopted, adapted and utilised in everyday practice, and how actions were framed in relation to the latest 'best new' framework to from the "cavalcade of concepts" (Stone 1989) were central to my research interests. Exploration of these practices, and the need to gain access to the 'grey literature' circulating about the BPEP initiative thus required a move away from the field of discourse into the physically more distant field of education decision-making and schooling practice in Nepal.

Exploring Institutions in Kathmandu

As the centre of donor activity and education policy decision-making, the various donor and government offices in Kathmandu were the obvious starting point for the Nepal-based aspects of my research as I sought to get 'up to speed' with developments in the Basic and Primary Education Project and broader shifts in development planning. Practical concerns also meant that a three month initial period in the capital was required, with a research visa to be obtained and basic language training to be conducted.⁷ I then alternated between Kathmandu and research work in various locations in the eastern district of Dhankuta, spending about a third of my time in the city, and the rest in the east.

Research activities in Kathmandu focused initially on the Basic and Primary Education Programme, with semi-structured interviews and discussions with donors, BPEP officials and Ministry of Education personnel. From these discussions I was given further points of contact and gradually expanded the network of people I was able to call on for advice and information, including officials at the Ministry of Finance, staff of externally-funded programmes, members of research consultancy groups with interests in the field of education

and decentralisation, and lobby groups such as the Federation of District Development Committees and the Nepal Federation of Nationalities (NEFEN). In addition, my affiliation with the Centre for Educational Research, Innovation and Development (CERID), part of Tribhuvan University, gave me an academic base from which to work.⁸ With all the sites, the separation of the research process from the topical focus of the study was often blurred: working in CERID, for example, also provided insights into the substantive issues of my study, notably the influence of donor funding on the type of research that takes place and thus the recommendations-led agenda of much of the work of the institution.

Initial meetings with any individual or organisation tended to be fairly formal, with a semi-structured interview forming the basis of the discussions. Prior to each meeting I would prepare a list of topics of interest, based on my understanding of the organisation and previous knowledge of the issues to be discussed. In some cases this would form the basis of the interaction, in others completely different issues would emerge as central to the discussion and I would pursue the emerging line of inquiry as appropriate. I was also fortunate to have a sustained period of research in Nepal, with the study spread over an 18 month period, thus allowing repeat visits to be made to organisations and individuals when responses could be clarified and key issues probed further. The flexibility of this approach allowed me to move from a more general, free-ranging approach at the start of the project towards a more targeted line of inquiry as I moved towards the writing-up stage of my work. In addition to more formal meetings, a major source of information was the informal contact I had with key individuals and the observations I was able to make of behaviour and interactions in a range of settings. For example, a round table discussion of the draft version of the EFA 2000 Country Report (EFA Assessment Committee 1999), held in the Ministry of Education, provided an ideal opportunity to observe the interaction between leading Nepali academics, consultants and government officials and the impact of the presence of donor representatives; a dinner with a number of foreign advisors working on the BPEP initiative gave me insights into the different lifestyles of donor staff and their Nepali counterparts; and spending Dasain (a major Hindu festival) with a former BPEP Director provided a chance to talk more informally about events and learn more about his wider

⁷ I had a two hour lesson each morning during this first period of Kathmandu based research. Further lessons took place on each return trip to the capital, developing my reading skills. My Nepali teacher also assisted with translation of key documents.

⁸ It is interesting to note that the approach I took to my work was markedly different from what was considered the norm in an academic institution almost entirely dependent on donor funding for research. Their research agenda was skewed towards that which could directly produce policy

involvement in politics and educational reform.⁹ As the research progressed and relationships with individuals and organisations developed, I was able, to varying degrees, to get beyond the public front presented at initial encounters and gain more insight into working practices and day-to-day relationships as opposed to the 'ideal type' practices presented in policy documents or in formal interviewing situations.

As the focus of my study shifted to a more contextualised study of education interventions within the broader framework of visions of development and the role of the state, so the type of organisation I contacted also changed. The Ministry of Education and the various parties involved in BPEP remained central, but the perspective offered by other decentralisation focused programmes, ethnic activist organisations, NGOs and *dalit* ('untouchable' groups) organisations also greatly enhanced the study. I was also able to visit a number of schools and projects in the Kathmandu Valley area, participate in a seminar at a newly-opened elite boarding school and observe the day-to-day and extra-curricular activities at both private and government schools. Many of the contacts for this later part of the research grew from meetings held at the district level with, for example, the local branches of organisations putting me in touch with their head offices in Kathmandu. Each layer of the research was thus not distinct, with each informing others. Indeed, these processes of inter-layer communication and cross-locale interactions were of particular interest and I actively pursued opportunities to deepen my understanding of how geographically disparate or hierarchically separated groups constructed their relationship with others.

Dimensions of the research, of course, emerged as a result of unforeseen events which I came across by chance. Of particular note in this regard was how I found myself in the midst of a demonstration held by various teacher unions to protest about the lack of security in schools and to demand that the government address the problems faced by teachers as a result of the violent activities of the Maoist guerrilla movement. On the day in question I was due to meet with an Under Secretary at the Ministry of Education and went along at the appointed time. When he did not arrive, I sat in his office for 45 minutes, talking to other staff members, and eventually decided the meeting was not going to take place. On leaving the building I realised why my interviewee was absent: a large group of teachers had blockaded the gate into the office grounds and were staging a protest on the main road

recommendations, with the methods adopted requiring representative sample districts from the hill, *terrai* and mountain areas and from East, West and Far West Nepal.

outside (f/n: 27/11/00, see Photograph 2). I then spent the rest of the day listening to speeches and talking with teachers about the protest, the problems they faced and the demands they were making. Such opportune events presented themselves at various points in the research (a chance meeting with an official on the bus or trail, being present when news of a Maoist attack reached the District Education Office, for example) allowing me to engage with people and discuss issues in a way that I had not foreseen would be possible.

Understanding Decision-Making and Educational Diversity at the District Level

The eastern hill district of Dhankuta was chosen as the site for the sub-national layers of my study for a number of reasons, both to do with my personal interests and the requirements of such a study. In examining the communication between layers of the administration and between different organisations, I wished to select a district that was also a Regional Headquarters in order to allow sustained contact with district and regional bodies with relative ease and particularly, given the relatively short period of time and the already multiple field sites, without having to travel long distances. In addition, while I had initially considered returning to the mid-west district of Dang, where I had previously conducted research, the growing concern over Maoist violence in the area made me wary of selecting such a site, particularly as my language skills and understanding of the local context were, at the start of the research period, rather limited. After negotiations with a number of people in Kathmandu and in the UK, Dhankuta was chosen as there were contacts there who could help negotiate my access into the various settings.

In more substantive terms, the ethnic and linguistic diversity within Dhankuta, its mix of government and private schools and its inclusion in a range of school based development interventions, including the Primary Education Project and BPEP, further enhanced its interest as a site. Indeed, with my study focusing on the transfer of information and communication of ideas between organisations and places, Dhankuta seemed of added interest as it is in a very real sense a lynch pin in communications in the east of Nepal, both in terms of its administrative role as a juncture between central, regional, district and local government and in relation to its geographical position. The construction of the road through the hills of Dhankuta, linking the *terrai* with the hill and mountainous districts of the east, gave the area a strong sense of being a meeting point of different cultures, lifestyles and

⁹ This approach meant that I was an 'outsider' wherever I was during the study period. While this was at times exhausting, this feeling of continual 'strangeness' was perhaps a sign of effective and ongoing ethnographic inquiry (see Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 114-116).

geographical zones.¹⁰ The bustling central corridor through the district, including the roadside settlements of Hile and Siduwa and the main bazaar town of Dhankuta, contrasted sharply, however, with areas situated off the main route, with more limited access to markets and an absence of services such as drinking water and electricity.

Dhankuta can certainly not be considered a 'typical' district nor as necessarily representative of Nepal as a whole. Given the topographic, ethnic and social diversity in the country, no district could be considered as such. In rankings of the various districts in terms of their Human Development Index rating, Dhankuta was placed 6th out of the 75 districts (NESAC 1998), literacy rates are considered to be relatively high and there has been extensive and sustained external involvement and aid in the area, including the British-built Pakhribas Agricultural Centre, the Nepal UK Community Forestry Project and the Community Literacy Project Nepal (CLPN). In many respects these factors made it a particularly fascinating site to work within, creating an environment in which competing discourses, different lifestyles and aspirations come together in a relatively condensed space. Further, research studies conducted in other districts of Nepal highlight relationships and practices strikingly similar to those explored in this thesis, which leads me to believe that, while not 'typical', this Dhankuta-based study serves a useful purpose as an illustrative case, highlighting key factors and concerns which are likely to find resonance in other areas as well.¹¹

Approaches to Research at the District Level

As with the Kathmandu-based research, my work in Dhankuta fluctuated between relatively formal interactions and exchanges of a more day-to-day nature, often involving the same people in a number of different contexts. For example, sitting drinking soda with the Project Coordinator on the steps of a shop produced a starkly different form of interaction than when I met him in his office, surrounded by Resource People. Each form of interaction had its advantages and drawbacks, allowing me to gain certain forms of information and to be more or less directive in my approach. Over a sustained period of time the combination of both more formalised discussions, where I carried a notebook and scribbled key phrases and comments as we talked, and more free-flowing encounters often of a 'chance' nature such as

¹⁰ See, for example, Furer-Haimendorf (1975) on the movement of Tibetan traders into this area, Edwards (1996) for a discussion of the *jaributi* [medicinal plants] trade along this route.

¹¹ Notably Parajuli's (*forthcoming*) research on decentralisation in Doti and Nawalparasi, Pigg (1992), Skinner and Holland's (1996) work in west Nepal, Awasti (2002) and Shrestha's (2000) work on Lalitpur in the Kathmandu Valley.

meeting teachers on the trail or at the market, allowed me to develop relations with individuals and gain further insights into the local context gradually.¹²

My 'entry' into the various offices at the district level followed a common pattern. I would begin by making a formal introduction to the highest official possible and attempt to organise a formal meeting, but frequently this attempt at pre-planning would not work and I would find myself ushered immediately into the District Development Committee (DDC) Chairman's, District Education Officer's or Mayor's office. I quickly adapted my approach to allow for this and found that the set up of offices, where the walls of the key official's room were lined with chairs and people came and went seeking an audience with him, was particularly conducive to allowing informal chat with officials at all levels and establishing contact with office staff of both senior and lower ranks. Such conversations often proved immensely fruitful, opening up opportunities to accompany Resource People on school visits, to gain access to a series of maps of the municipality and to attend cultural programmes and competitions run by schools. Such interactions always deepened my insight into communicative practices further than would have been possible had I confined my interests to the views of key senior personnel.

These initial meetings allowed me to gain approval for my research from senior officials, who acted as 'gatekeepers' to my access to the office as a whole and, in the case of the DEO, the schools of the district. They also established a pattern of interaction that I was able to build on throughout the study period. As Hammersley and Atkinson so aptly note, fieldworkers wishing to spend protracted periods of time observing a particular setting have to become adept at 'managing loitering' (1995: 56). The particular set up of district level offices made this relatively easy, with visitors continually coming and going. As time went on and I established stronger links with various staff members, I was able to come and go to the office quite freely and was able to observe interactions and engage in discussions with relative ease.¹³ This approach also led to a distinct interviewing style emerging, whereby a conversation with an individual frequently resulted in a small group discussion. At times this

¹² I would attempt to write up these activities as soon as possible after the event, but it was often difficult to find space to write undisturbed. Using a computer would have been impossible, both in terms of the lack of electricity in a number of sites and the attention it attracted if I did use it. Much of the writing up was thus done at the end of the day and took the form of hand written notes.

¹³ Shifts in relations among the staff occasionally affected my role in the office. The arrival of a new Project Coordinator (PC), for instance, altered the dynamics of intra-office relations significantly. RPs would no longer gather en masse in the PC's room and would disperse into the two administrative offices or spend more time in the teashop. I would then have to spend time with the various groups,

proved advantageous, throwing up new ideas and allowing exchanges of views to take place. At other points, it was obvious that the original interviewee was unable to express their views as openly as they may have wished in this common forum; at which point the benefits of more private locations, such as going on visits which involved walking along trails or meeting for a snack in a teashop became apparent. My ability to gain access and engage in meaningful discussions with officers in both a formal and informal capacity was further enhanced when the opportunity arose to work alongside a Nepali woman for part of my work.

The Research Assistant Dilemma

During the initial phase of my work in Dhankuta (October-December 1999) it became clear that my work would be much easier and potentially far more rewarding if I was accompanied by a Nepali on some of my visits. In part this was a result of language limitations. While I attained a proficient level of Nepali fairly rapidly, and could engage in everyday conversation and discussions on education-based topics, I continued to have difficulties understanding technical discussions on subjects outside my main area of interest, such as savings and credit groups or agricultural issues. In addition, there was the issue of companionship and safety, particularly when I was visiting schools and villages in areas where I was not living and where people did not know who I was. These considerations outweighed my initial concern about employing an interpreter, my worry that this may mean my work was less my own, and that a second person may complicate the relationships I wished to establish with various interviewees.¹⁴

During my first visit to Dhankuta, I was introduced to a young, recently-married woman, who had spent several years studying in the US, was fluent in English and had previously worked with a number of development projects in the district. She was interested in practising English and in continuing to do some activity outside the home, so the idea of accompanying me on research outings appealed to her.¹⁵ The fact that she was well known around Dhankuta bazaar and had previously worked in the Municipality office opened up channels for meetings which, without her, could have been more difficult to access. It could,

circulating between rooms on alternate days and trying to maintain positive relations with all groups in what was a tense readjustment period.

¹⁴ Looking back on the research experience, I realise I should not have worried. Working alongside a woman from Dhankuta thoroughly enhanced the research experience and in a number of key situations eased access into villages, schools and offices.

of course, be argued that two researchers, and thus two people's background and status, complicates the research and I was rather wary of the reception that we would receive. However, as the research progressed, I became convinced that I had made the correct decision, with the presence of a woman from the district, but not necessarily from the exact location we were working within, facilitating initial discussions and allowing a far easier point from which to begin than would have been possible if I was alone. Many interactions began with a discussion of where she lived, who she knew and the controversy of her recent, inter-ethnic marriage. These conversations led into discussions of how we had become friends and what I was doing here, all conversations which helped interviewees place us and establish a fruitful rapport, particularly during village level interviews with parents and community members.

There were, of course, occasions when working with an assistant proved to be a disadvantage, when her presence appeared to make the interaction more formal and intrusive. Meetings at the DEO, for instance, were noticeably less productive than when I went alone, perhaps because her English language ability challenged existing hierarchies of age and status and undermined the officials' sense of their own linguistic abilities. In one school, which I had repeatedly visited over the fieldwork period, her presence had a negative impact, with the all-male staff not appreciating a young female, without a degree, asking them questions.¹⁶ We thus constantly adjusted our working style, and I continued to work alone at times when I felt this was more appropriate. On the whole, however, the experience of working in this way made the data collection process far more enjoyable, even on very practical terms such as having someone to walk along the trail with, and greatly enhanced my expectations of what I could achieve from the research, a shift which I hope is reflected in the substantive content of the thesis.

Exploring School and Village Life

As well as the main bazaar area in the district, I also spent time in outlying schools and villages in an effort to gain an understanding of the impact of the BPEP and other externally-funded initiatives at the school level and how these were viewed in light of other issues impacting on school and community life in the particular locale. I spent a total of 7 months, in 2 blocks, in one VDC, a month in another and made visits, from these locations and from

¹⁵ I was not in a position to pay the daily rate that she had previously been paid while working for other organisations, but it quickly transpired that money was not her main motivation for agreeing to work, so the token amount I was able to offer was more than acceptable.

the main bazaar, to a further 4 areas. The choice of these sites was based on their relative distance from the main bazaar, as I wished to get a sense of the different attitudes in more or less 'remote' areas of the district.

It should be noted that I did not have an entirely free hand when selecting sites to live in and schools to study. As noted above, over the course of the study period there was a considerable growth in Maoist activity in the district and I had to take this into consideration in planning my research agenda. While I was not overly concerned about my own safety — foreigners have largely not been direct targets of attacks — I was concerned that my presence would draw unwanted attention to schools I was visiting. Foreign volunteers in schools, both in this district and throughout the country, had been asked to leave as part of a broader Maoist concern with reducing foreign involvement in school.¹⁷ Indeed, in one VDC area I visited, a Peace Corps volunteer had been asked to leave and the organisation was advised by the school not to send any more volunteers to the area. I was thus wary of putting other people at risk for what was essentially a project primarily for my own personal benefit. When I heard that a bank and school in one of the areas I had visited had been attacked by armed Maoists I made a decision not to return to the area, a move which may have limited my research in terms of my understanding of relations between the central authorities and more remotely placed schools.

In total 36 schools were studied in Dhankuta, over two thirds of which I visited repeatedly throughout the whole research period.¹⁸ The type of contact that I had with schools varied; some were one-off visits as part of a day spent accompanying a Resource Person on their inspection visits, others were one-off visits without an RP, as part of a short visit to an outlying VDC. Most often, however, I tried to make repeated visits to schools, incorporating (relatively) formal interviews, classroom observation, attendance at extra-curricular events and just 'loitering', talking to teachers and students as they sat outside in the sunshine.

In addition to talking to people directly involved in schooling, such as teachers, school management committee members and students, I also wished to explore perceptions of schooling held by parents and the wider community, to understand the broader role of the institution and how more general conflicts and concerns were played out or reflected in the

¹⁶ My own status as a young woman appears to have been mediated by my nationality and educational level.

¹⁷ See Chapter 7 for a more detailed discussion of this policy and the activities of the Maoists.

¹⁸ I also visited a number of private and government schools in Kathmandu and the surrounding area.

daily practices of the school. Individual interviews and group-based discussions were semi-formally conducted with a large number of individuals (approximately 70), and informal conversations were held, often repeatedly, with many more. The timing of visits to people's homes varied, in order to ensure that a range of informants in terms of gender and age were involved in the study: during the day, for example, we found that it was generally only young children and older people at home, with other family members out working in the fields. Much detail was also gleaned from taking part in community activities, such as attending the weekly market, helping prepare homes for various festivals, watching volleyball and football matches and observing meetings and discussions at the VDC office, the police post and teashops.

In addition to interviews, discussions and participant-observation at all levels of the study, this school level work also saw me engage in periods of classroom observation, an approach which was only partially useful, as the presence of an observer made the class far from 'typical'. On occasions when I asked if I could watch a class in progress, the teacher tended to put on a display unlike that which took place on other occasions when I was generally circulating in the school. The teacher would teach throughout the period and make use of textbooks and any resources — notably the 'pocket board' charts and cards and bottle top attendance sheets made during BPEP training sessions.¹⁹ (See Photograph 3.)

Such classes were more 'model' exhibition classes than true pictures of everyday practice. This was made abundantly clear in one school where I was asked if I had 'seen enough', in which case the teacher would stop teaching. When I explained that I hoped to keep returning to the school and classrooms over the course of the next two weeks, attitudes quickly changed and the teachers returned to their more normal practices of setting children repetitive tasks and then sitting in the sun or playing 'Ludo' in the head teacher's office. Fluctuating between methods, and constantly reflecting on how effective they were and the impact of my presence in each setting, enabled me to adjust the approach taken to suit the particular context and group of potential informants.

¹⁹ As part of the BPEP package, training sessions were delivered on two key areas in particular: the 'whole school approach' and 'multi-grade teaching'. The pedagogical issues were somewhat diluted in the course of the translation of the initiative from the central level to the district and then the schools and teachers tended to associate the training with the materials produced during the session. The whole school approach, for example, was associated with a pocket-board, a set of flashcards and a bottle-top attendance board.

Blurred Boundaries: Moving Between Spaces

While I have drawn attention to the distinct dimensions or 'layers' of my research work, the boundaries between these settings are blurred, with individuals frequently transcending these boundaries, travelling between settings and communicating with people in different areas. This aspect of relationships was of particular importance to my research, as I sought to understand communicative practices and how people viewed and represented themselves and others. Some of the most intriguing insights I gained during my research work arose, therefore, in witnessing the effects of people crossing boundaries, interacting with people outside their more usual setting.

Examples of such blurred boundaries were found in a number of contexts. I would frequently encounter teachers from outlying schools attending meetings in the main bazaar and have an opportunity to observe their interactions with the DEO or DDC authorities, for instance. During one block of work in Dhankuta, an official from BPEP in Kathmandu visited the district and I was able to note the changes in practice and demeanour of the district officials as a result of this potential source of surveillance from above. Sometimes people from the district would contact me when they were visiting Kathmandu, and I was able to gain an understanding of how people managed this transition and dealt with relations in a new context. During one such case, I was invited to meet a teacher from a Dhankuta school in a café in Kathmandu, a place, it transpired, that was owned by a former Mayor of Dhankuta Municipality and in which the overwhelming majority of the clientele were from the district. The most extreme case of 'dislocation' came when I met a group of Nepali BPEP and Ministry of Education staff in Copenhagen, where they were based for a number of months as part of a DANIDA funded study programme. Such examples offered ideal opportunities to discuss and observe interconnections between places and people, as well as examine points where communication and understanding between parties broke down or was non-existent.

Related to the idea of blurred boundaries is the question of where, if at all, fieldwork ends. In many respects my return to the UK did not mark a departure from 'the field', but rather a different engagement with the fields of research. Travelling to Denmark to visit Nepali officials and donor representatives, reading discussion forums on the massacre of the Nepali royal family on the internet, receiving letters and discussing events with friends in Nepal are all events which blur the distinction between 'home' and 'the field', challenging the archetypal view of such places (see Gupta and Ferguson 1997). The form of engagement

with the field is, of course, markedly different and the insights that can be gained and the people with whom it is possible to engage with limited.²⁰ Insights are limited to the thoughts and concerns that people are willing to commit to written form — discussion of the intricacies of donor relations or personal thoughts on the Maoists' agenda are unlikely to be well developed in such communications.

Constructing the Researcher

People involved in the research at all levels, from donor representatives to parents, sought to slot me into a familiar category, to locate me within their experience in order to guide how they should interact with me.²¹ At the level of school and community interviews and observations, the categories of development worker and teaching volunteer were the most frequently presumed roles, with a number of schools initially assuming I wished to teach there and others fearing that I may be there to inspect the school and feedback information to donors. Such fears of surveillance were also initially raised by staff at various district and village level offices, concerns which were possible to allay over time and with sustained interaction and discussion. In addition, as a person with a high degree of mobility who had contact with various officials in Kathmandu, I was sometimes seen as a potential channel for communication back up through the system and was thus asked to convey messages to people, particularly donors, to let them know what the situation was 'really' like in these contexts.

Indeed, throughout the research, people would attempt to cast me in the role of someone who could influence the course of events in their favour. Requests to assist the various people I had spent time with were frequently raised. For example, district officials asked me to convey their feelings about BPEP to the donors in Kathmandu. An official at the Ministry of Education hoped I would promote his hotel web site in the UK. At times such requests made me feel rather uncomfortable, as they highlighted the relatively one-sided, extractive nature of much of the research I was doing. I was therefore careful to explain to people the limited extent to which I would be able to help them and to counter any assumptions that were made about the benefits I may be able to bring to the individual or school. Such claims and requests were most commonly made during my initial encounters with people, as I was

²⁰ Issues such as access to the internet and levels of literacy mean that I am only able to maintain contact with people in Kathmandu by this means. Communication with friends in Dhankuta is generally maintained through writing letters to people with higher levels of literacy, asking them to convey messages to others. The possibility for meaningful dialogue is thus constrained.

²¹ A strategy which, Hammersley & Atkinson (1995: 80) note, is apparent in many research contexts.

slotted into existing categories and assumptions of the role of foreigners; as time went on I was surprised at how little I was asked for assistance by people.

The gradual building of rapport was particularly evident in my relationship with a number of the Resource People and teachers working in my study district. Initially there was evident concern about what my role was going to be when I visited schools or offices, particularly in relation to whether I would be feeding back specific information to Ministry officials in Kathmandu or to 'the donors'. One school Head-Sir (the colloquial name given to the head teacher) noted (in English) that I was a 'dangerous woman', partly in jest but also betraying an underlying uncertainty about my position. I attempted to deal with these concerns in as upfront and honest a manner as possible, telling people that I would be likely to meet with donor and government representatives and that they knew which district I was conducting research in, but that I would not be mentioning names of specific places, schools or people. I tried to stress that my work was not an evaluation of specific schools, but that I wanted to gain a more general picture of relationships and communication.

As I spent more time with people and engaged in day-to-day activities as well as more obvious research work such as interviewing people and scribbling in a notebook, I partially lost the status of *thulo manche* (literally 'big person') that seemed to have been conferred on me in light of my nationality, the fact I was doing a PhD and that I had friends among the Kathmandu elite. I was able to spend time in schools and offices without comment and was regularly invited for meals in people's homes and for tea with officials even when I wasn't going to be visiting the office. A particularly strong sign that I was not seen as a threat or a dangerous source of surveillance was that I was increasingly asked to accompany RPs on school visits and to attend events in schools. Indeed, one RP told me quite directly that they felt I was much more of an equal than I had been at the start of the research, noting that "now we correct your Nepali and you correct our English", a reference to the numerous linguistic errors I made during my initial visits to the DEO, but which no one felt comfortable to correct.²²

²² An interesting twist to the language issue was the use of a form of speech which was neither English nor Nepali, what Williams (1985, cited in Ferguson 1994: 259) has referred to as 'devspeak', a particular language of development. It was fascinating to note that in contexts where the focus of discussion was BPEP activities, the acronyms used and the specialist use of phrases and terminology meant that a high level of communication could be maintained, even when at the beginning of the study when my Nepali was limited. Indeed, in such situations the woman who accompanied me on

At the central level, particularly among donor staff, there was notable concern that, as an academic researcher, I may be overly critical of the BPEP project, highlighting a concern about the apparently different, even conflicting, sets of interests of development workers and researchers working in the field of development studies. Following De Chene, I was also concerned that I may encounter an unassailable rift between the perceived roles of practitioner and academic which could prove detrimental to my work. As she notes:

When the infamous 'real world' meets the equally infamous 'ivory tower of academia', the result is too often an unproductive, even uncomprehending standoff. Both academics and development workers can easily believe that the other inhabits a fictional world, while they themselves best know the real condition of 'the people' (De Chene 1996: 259).

At the inception of this study I was also keenly aware of the potentially conflicting outlooks even within the academy. The ongoing discussion about the role of anthropology in development practice highlights key aspects of potential difference, distinguishing between 'development anthropology', oriented towards assisting in the development process, and the 'anthropology of development', an approach which critiques the very processes which make up the development enterprise (Grillo 1997, Ferguson 1997. See also Sacherer 1986 for a personal account of working as an anthropologist within the development bureaucracy in Nepal). Such distinctions are in part useful, helping to distinguish more directly practice-oriented research from that of a more abstract, theoretical nature and that offering a broader critique of processes. However, as I felt in relation to my own work, this division does not capture fully the extent to which the same piece of research can be oriented to fit both sets of interests. I was very conscious that my work was a primarily academic piece, seeking to offer a broader critique of how certain discourses of development become salient and attain a position of apparent hegemony in particular contexts. Yet, I was also aware that aspects of the work, such as the exploration of BPEP in practice and the discussion of decentralisation efforts, are of practical interest to those working in the field of aid programme development and delivery. Mediating between these two dimensions of my work was far from easy. As the World Bank extract that began this chapter highlights, I was at times pressed to make recommendations and draw policy implications from my work, a position that I felt uncomfortable about as I had not set out to examine issues from this perspective.

research trips found it difficult to follow such conversations, despite her grasp of both English and Nepali.

Such a tension highlights the very different demands of the two spheres, but also indicates that the two need not be mutually exclusive; the material collected during my research is likely to provide a basis for contributions to both areas of interest.²³ While the focus of this thesis is potentially of more academic interest — showing how discourses of development, schooling and the nation have been interpreted and used by diverse groups in Nepal — there is potential to write a parallel piece drawing on the same material, which would be of more direct interest to practitioners. The importance of targeting work to a particular audience and acknowledging the impact of different writing styles is thus a key element of the research process, an issue to which I now turn.

From Fieldnotes to Thesis: The Writing Process

Throughout the research process a range of writing styles has been utilised, from the highly personal nature of writing fieldnotes, which were primarily for my own use, to the production of a public text, in the form of this thesis. These different textual forms and, significantly, the transition from one to another through the process of analysis and representation, require consideration in their own right, as an integral part of the research process.

The construction of fieldnotes as a particular type of text has received some consideration and the process of their production has increasingly been subject to reflection in the same way as the process of engagement with informants and participants in the research (see, for example, the edited volume by Sanjek 1990). These texts are often considered private records of personal field experience, written in a language to provoke the researcher's own memories, to trigger thoughts and recall events which were never written down, what Ottenberg refers to as "headnotes" (1990: 144).

In my own recorded accounts of my field experience, four distinctive elements of the texts are distinguishable, interwoven in a single piece of writing as opposed to being split into separate pieces such as a personal diary and notes based on observation. The fieldnotes incorporated as much observational material as possible, details of conversations held, the layout of rooms and buildings, and the interactions observed between people, written up from memory and from the "scratch notes" (Ottenberg 1990) made during interviews and visits. With this temporal distance, even if only a few minutes or at most a few hours

²³ Although, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, it is likely that different conventions and writing styles will need to be engaged with in each case.

between the event and the writing of notes, the process of writing also allowed for a period of reflection on the process of conducting research and consideration of the types of questions I was pursuing and the methods I was employing. Similarly, the reflexive space that the writing process gave me also allowed initial attempts at analysis and the exploration of linkages between different dimensions of the study to be instigated. These were often very 'rough and ready', a few scribbled diagrams or some key ideas to be explored further, but they did help develop and guide the research and became more detailed as the work progressed. Finally, the fieldnote texts also provided an outlet to express my own personal concerns and feelings about the research, a mechanism which helped mediate the feelings of isolation and uncertainty which characterised my first foray into each new field site.²⁴ My fieldnotes are thus rather 'raw', unpolished texts, yet a key source both of data in themselves and a record of the progress of the research and the shifts in interest and emphasis that took place over time.

The shift to the more polished and nuanced writing conventions required for the production of a public text such as a thesis required the further analysis of the fieldnote material, a process of indexing and categorising, and the integration of this primary material with the insights gained from both primary and secondary written sources. In this process, I was conscious that I could lose something of the character of the work that had been conducted, the 'feel' of the various contexts within which I had been working. In response to this, I have attempted to incorporate a sense of the different settings and the flavour of interactions by using extracts taken from fieldnotes in order to bring the arguments presented in the thesis to life.²⁵ Extracts derived from fieldnotes are referenced by the date on which the events took place.

The process of writing for an audience, of preparing a piece to be circulated in the public domain, raises a number of ethical and practical concerns that are crucial to flag up here. In particular, given the concerns raised by a number of people who participated in the study about the possible 'surveillance' aspect of my work, the issue of anonymity is of key interest, particularly at the district and school level. As I have explained through this chapter, I informed people who engaged with my work that, while I would be mentioning the name of the district where I was working, I would not be mentioning particular schools or, wherever

²⁴ Indeed, there are certain segments of my notes which are quite difficult to read, bringing back memories of my loneliness and lack of confidence during my initial trip to my research sites.

²⁵ In developing this practice I have drawn on the approaches taken by Crewe & Harrison (1998), Arce & Long (1991) and Robinson-Pant (1997), among others.

possible, particular people. I do not, and did not, claim to provide complete anonymity to participants in the research, as I recognised that people engaged in work in the education sector in Nepal may be able to locate the places and people mentioned. Rather, I sought to write in such a way that people are identified by their position, rather than by name, thereby depersonalising the comments to a certain degree.²⁶ I have also chosen to omit certain data and events that I considered to be too specific and potentially damaging, although this has not dramatically affected the strength of the central arguments I have pursued through this study.

Finally, I wish to highlight a central concern with a piece of writing which encompasses multiple layers and draws on a range of sources of material: the difficulty of representing the complex series of inter-linkages and intertwined concerns in the coherent, linear form required of an academic text. Clearly, 'lived experience' does not fall neatly into chapters. The process of bringing together, in a single text, insights gained in the various field sites, both in Nepal and from the field of development discourses, inevitably involves losing some of the complexity of the web of interactions. I hope that the style of writing adopted here, particularly the interplay between fieldnotes and theoretical concerns, will give a sense of these linkages and overlapping experiences and provide a rich picture of how discourses are adapted as they are used in the daily negotiations and decision-making by individuals and groups with vested interests in schooling provision.

As Hawthorn notes, research in the social sciences can be considered a process of "understanding more and knowing less" (1991), a view point which neatly sums up the way I felt upon reaching the apparent end of this study, the writing phase. In many senses, the study as represented by this thesis is not 'complete'; I do not offer any easy answers to questions about schooling provision or neat recommendations for improved development intervention. Rather, I provide a particular perspective on events and relationships which I hope will help contextualise current development planning and offer a deeper understanding of the competing discourses of development, schooling and the state which inform decision-making and the actions of individuals and groups in particular contexts. In reading what follows, it may be useful to consider the different chapters as the overlaying of different screens, with each layer transforming the structure and colour of the overall image. Such an analogy is useful as it also leaves open the possibility for new layers to be added which will

²⁶ I elected not to change the name of the district. Discussing a hill district in east Nepal that is the site of the Regional Education Directorate, would have narrowed the field to one.

further deepen or even transform current understandings of the issues raised. Indeed, as Clifford notes, an ethnographic study can only ever hope to produce “partial truths” (Clifford 1986). What follows may most fruitfully be viewed in this light, as a piece that highlights the interconnections, linkages and relationships generally sidelined or rendered invisible in much development discourse, planning and practice, while acknowledging that the possibility remains to extend further these connections and deepen the level of understanding of the various strands.

In turning now to the main substantive discussion of the thesis, I wish to begin with a historical overview of the relationship between schooling, development and the Nepali state, to provide a springboard from which to explore the contemporary context and the position of the Basic and Primary Education Programme in particular.

Chapter 2

“Repeated Beginnings”: A Historical Perspective on Education Policy and the (Re)Construction of the Nepali Nation-State

“There is a word for development in the Nepali language: bikas. Following the overthrow of the Rana autarchy in 1951, the word began to gain currency. A status divide emerged between the bikasi and the abikasi. Those who had acquired some knowledge of so-called modern science and technology identified themselves as bikasis (developed), supposedly with a ‘modern’ outlook, and the rest as abikasis or pakhe (uncivilised, underdeveloped, or backward). There was money in bikas, and the funding for bikas projects, mostly through foreign aid, was beginning to swell. Development was no longer just a concept. It became a practice which fortified, and even exacerbated, the existing class hierarchy. The wealthy, the powerful, the more educated embraced bikas, became bikasis. The garib (poor) were abikasis. As the logic went, the poor became poor because they were abikasi; they impeded bikas” (Shrestha 1995: 268).

Introduction

Since the establishment of the first academic school in Nepal in 1854,¹ the Durbar School in Kathmandu, the development of education policy has been strongly influenced both by external models of schooling and education reform and how the ruling elite wish to represent the relationship between the various groups within the Nepali state. The provision of schooling has historically been strongly intertwined with ideas of development, prestige and social status and, as such, is an important site for political interventions aimed at promoting particular visions of the state, both to the Nepali populace and on the international stage. The education system — and primary schooling in particular — has emerged as one of the state institutions with a particularly significant presence throughout the country and, as such, became a site of political interest for the various post-1950 governments seeking to promote particular visions of the Nepali nation-state.

¹ Prior to the establishment of the Durbar School, formal schooling was conducted primarily through religious institutions such as *gompas* [Buddhist temple] schools and Sanskrit-medium schools (see Wood 1973, Bennett 1979, Upraity 1982, Vir 1988, Ragsdale 1989).

Each shift in political regime has been followed by the revision of the education system as the incoming regime attempted to reinforce its vision of the idea of the Nepali nation-state through re-articulating the relationship between the state, schools and 'the people'. The school has been used multifariously by the state to maintain divisions, especially under the Rana regime when formal schooling was explicitly denied to all but the ruling elite, and at times to promote national unity, such as through the introduction of the National Education System Plan under the *panchayat* system. This continual redefining has led to a feeling of "repeated beginnings" (Onta 1996: 221) as newly-formed governments sought to legitimate their position and promote the interests of the various groups that supported them by differentiating themselves from the previous regime.

Yet, as will be explored through this chapter, despite attempts to present each consecutive National Plan and education policy as a departure from the previous one, there is considerable continuity in the approach taken since 1951, with the legacy of previous governments continuing to influence the policy and practice of the successor administration. For example, the valuation of English-medium schooling over Nepali-language instruction and, as Onta notes, the "cumulative nationalization of school curricula that happened over the 1960s and the 1970s" remain clearly visible in the schooling system of the 1990s (Onta 1996: 221). In addition, the struggle between national interests and the importance of donor funding and external legitimacy continues to inform the relationship between the state and the school.

The relationship between schooling and the state is generally formulated in such a way as to secure and even advance the position of the ruling elite within the changed social and political context. In the post-Rana period this results from the formulation of ideas of the 'nation' and of 'development' which, while being presented as neutral, converge with the cultural and social traits associated with the ruling groups. Purportedly 'national education' is actually education which promotes a particular vision of the nation — and benefits a specific group within it. Due to the considerable donor involvement in the education sector since the early 1950s, this construction of a national education system is also strongly influenced by external visions and representations of 'Nepal' and the wider development aid agenda of agencies involved in the reform process. Burghart's assertion that the *panchayat* government legitimated itself "on native terms, but through foreign eyes" (1996: 260) is therefore more widely illuminating in terms of education policy development. Education as a 'national' project thus requires articulation 'on native terms', but the requirement of

foreign funding and support ensures that ideas and forms of organisation must be legible within an international context. After the return to multi-party democracy in 1990, this assertion does, to some extent, still hold. In this context, however, foreign terms — in particular development discourse — are increasingly being utilised to justify actions and articulate relationships between groups by the state and by groups offering alternative visions of relationships alike, as will be further elucidated in Chapter 7.

Through this chapter² I wish to set the BPEP initiative and current education practices in a broader historical context in order to cut through the rhetoric of novelty and the continuing evolution of improved educational planning and allow an exploration of the continuity and contradictions in the various education reforms introduced in Nepal. I provide an historical overview of the development of education policy in Nepal, with particular attention paid to the various, and often conflicting, visions of the Nepali nation-state dominant at each juncture. In doing so, attention will be drawn to the tensions surrounding how, and which, social differences become salient in specific contexts. Further, exploring how the “cavalcade of concepts” (Stone 1989) which emanate from donor agencies are selectively incorporated into the policies and practice of the Nepali education authorities will provide a strong historical basis for understanding the inter- and intra-state relations which form the context into which BPEP has been inserted. The chapter takes a chronological journey through the development of Nepal’s education system, with a particular focus on the intertwining of visions of external and internal relations and the construction of the Nepali state. The route begins, however, not with aid agencies and international assistance, but with an isolationist policy and a “private enterprise state” seeking to advance the financial and political interests of the ruling family (Mihaly 1965: 14).

‘Selective Exclusion’: Education Under the Ranas (1846-1950)

“Of all the closed lands of this world”, noted the journalist Perceval Landon in 1926, “closed by the deliberate will and policy of those who live in them; closed whether from piety, superstition, jealousy or perhaps above all from mistrust of the European — Nepal is

² The chapter draws on primary sources such as education policy documents, donor accounts of initiatives and secondary source material to piece together a picture of how emerging visions of ‘the state’ are utilised by various groups and how such constructions of ‘Nepal’ have become intertwined with ideas about the provision of schooling and perceptions of development. The Nepal material provides a fascinating case study of the emergence of a national education system amidst dramatic political change. However, the broader context of this thesis necessitates a somewhat schematic treatment of some events and periods in the historical development of the political system in order to allow a focus on the core theme of relations between the school, the state and perceptions of development.

the only survivor” (Landon 1976 [1926]:vi).³ The Rana era, extending from the overthrow of the Shah kings in the Kot Massacre of 1846⁴ through to the restoration of the monarchy in 1950, marked a period in which the ruling elite sought to maintain their almost absolute power internally while struggling to accommodate the demands made by the East India Company, the government of British India and later the Republic of India (Burghart 1996: 227). The King was reduced to being a “religious and ceremonial figurehead”, with the Rana family taking not only the hereditary Prime Ministership but also dominating the army and civil government positions.⁵ The isolationist position adopted can be seen both in terms of the contact between the state and the international community and in relation to intra-state relations, with little attempt being made to integrate or unite the various communities within Nepal into a cohesive national unit. Rather, the Ranas attempted to maintain their power and legitimacy through the use of force, instilling fear among the geographically scattered population. Thus, despite being a unitary state within almost the same territorial boundaries since 1769, under the Ranas Nepal never became “unified in spirit” (Mihaly 1965: 14).

During this period the external relations of the Nepali state were characterised by the limiting of contact with other states as a consequence of geographical factors — the fact the state was bordered to the north by the Himalayas and to the south by thick, malarial forest — and, most significantly, the political restrictions imposed by the Treaty of Sagauli signed with the East India Company in 1815.⁶ As a result of this, all contact with a third party was to be negotiated with the British and a permanent British Resident was to be allowed in Kathmandu. The British had little interest in gaining total control over the territory, with their strategic interests in the region more efficiently solved in maintaining Nepal’s independence, creating a buffer-zone between British India and China. Indeed, maintaining this neutrality was easier than attempting to tackle the significant environmental barriers that a military assault on Nepal would have entailed.

³ Landon was a Special Correspondent for The Times newspaper. His work on Nepal was commissioned by Chandra Shumshere Rana, the Prime Minister of Nepal at this time.

⁴ Instigated by Jung Bahadur Rana in a temporary alliance with the Queen, the Kot massacre of 15th September 1846 saw the routing of the leading noblemen and the fleeing of the King to Banaras. Attempts were made by the King in 1847 to regain his position, but he was taken prisoner and the heirs to the throne were kept under strict surveillance (see Wright 1958 [1877] for a detailed account of these events).

⁵ The monarchy was, however, retained on the throne to give the new regime a degree of popular legitimacy, even though the royal family remained virtual “prisoners in the palace” (Mihaly 1965: 14).

⁶ As Burghart notes, from 1814 “the territorial ambition of the Nepalese government came into open conflict with that of the East India Company” which led to a series of battles and “culminated in the Nepalese accepting a cessation of hostilities on the terms proposed by the Company” (Burghart 1996: 227).

However, as Liechty (1997) highlights in his discussion of the movement of goods and people into and out of the Kathmandu Valley, the Ranas' policy was not so much one of total isolationism but rather the "selective exclusion" of particular aspects of "foreignness". The contact with the British in India exposed the Ranas to Western ideas and institutions, some of which came to influence how the regime governed the state and sought to enhance their own position within it and in the region. For example, the preparation of the first Civil Code, the *Muluki Ain* of 1854, can partly be seen as inspired by Western interests in more formalised codification, "even though in terms of content the code was largely based upon the major Hindu / Indian texts and upon existing Nepalese practices" (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1999: 50). Liechty highlights how "both isolation and efforts to 'hold back time' were state policies and increasingly state myths" and suggests that "Nepal's management of foreignness through a practice of selective exclusion shifted from being a strategy of foreign policy (to protect the state from foreign intervention) to a desperate domestic policy (to protect the Rana regime from its own people)" (Liechty 1997: 8).⁷

Internally, divisions between caste and ethnic groups were strongly emphasised along ethnic and Hindu caste lines, which were legally formalised in the *Muluki Ain* (Legal Code) of 1854, in order to create a national hierarchy which effectively legitimated the position of the ruling group.⁸ As Pfaff-Czarnecka notes:

The Rana rulers created an official discourse that enabled the state to rule and maintain the social order by fixing lines and regulations according to caste / ethnic membership and hierarchical status. In this way, the Ranas had a deep impact on the way the Nepalese came to perceive their relationship with one another in a countrywide perspective. By establishing a hierarchical order, however, they gave a green light to ethnic competition and intra-ethnic differentiation ... Thus by adopting formerly existing categories, the Nepalese rulers made the caste / ethnic divisions more rigid. This resulted in the enhanced importance of caste / ethnic affiliation in dealings with the state (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1999: 68).

The diversity within the Nepali state was thus recognised through a framework of inequality, with cultural variation framed around the central pillar of Hinduism and rulers presented as a focal point of the political and ritual order (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1999: 52, Burghart 1996).

⁷ This fluctuation in position was also considerably influenced by the character and interests of particular leaders. The 104 years of Rana rule did not constitute a period of uniform oppression, some leaders sought to extend ties with external forces to a greater extent than others. However, the overwhelming interest in ensuring the continued supremacy of the oligarchy meant that more lenient Prime Ministers were forced to resign or flee into exile in India (as was the case with Dev Shumshere in 1901 and Juddha Shumshere in 1945).

⁸ See Höfer (1979) for a detailed discussion of the content of the *Muluki Ain* and its implications.

Prestige and social advancement thus came to be associated with the practices and customs of high caste Hindu groups, with opportunities to gain education and employment in the civil service strongly linked to familial and caste ties with the Rana elite.⁹ Such a vision gained further legitimacy as members of various ethnic groups sought to enhance their positions through adopting the cultural symbols and traits of those in power (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1999: 53), a move which both secured greater opportunities for the ethnic elite and further divided any potential sources of opposition to the Rana regime.¹⁰ Internal legitimacy was thus gained through recourse to a vision of a Hindu-based hierarchical model and the image, if not the practice, of monarchical supremacy. External legitimacy and the ability to enter into negotiations on the world stage was made possible by framing decisions within models intelligible to Western, and specifically British, audiences.

Education Under the Ranas

This somewhat contradictory attitude to the world outside the state boundaries, which sought to “both limit the dangers inherent in foreignness, and at the same time harness its powers” (Liechty 1997: 9), is particularly clearly highlighted in relation to the provision of education under Rana rule. While there was a strong recognition of the need for the ruling class to engage with Western-style education in order to increase their ability to participate effectively in negotiations with other states, there was also considerable fear of the “idea of giving education to the common people lest they should be awakened and be conscious of their rights” (Shakya 1977: 19). Education was treated with considerable suspicion, as was evident to Perceval Landon during his period in Nepal in the early 1900s, when he noted “the first beginnings of education were looked upon with something of the mistrust with which the medieval church of Rome heard of the work of scientists within her fold” (Landon 1976 [1926]: 179). As a result, schooling opportunities were severely restricted, even for the elite, and popular education was almost non-existent. Indeed, in 1877, the British Resident Surgeon in Kathmandu remarked that the subject of schools could be dismissed as “briefly as that of snakes in Ireland. There are none” (Wright 1958 [1877]: 18). Whatever education

⁹ This legal codification of intra-state relations and the strict taxation policies of the Ranas were also somewhat variably enforced, with the selective subjugation of groups to the full force of the ruling regime. For example, the Ranas required the support of Brahmin leaders in order to maintain their own high caste position: the Ranas initially belonged to a minor Chettri (warrior caste) family and thus had to elevate their status and caste position through a reimagining of their collective past. “The assistance of the Brahmins was indispensable in this process, as a consequence of which Brahmin interests could never be ignored” (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1999: 51). In addition, the extent of attempts to rule and tightly control activities outside the Kathmandu Valley and more inaccessible regions of the country was limited, due to the limited additional income which would arise in relation to the high cost of dispatching administrative and military personnel (Mihaly 1965: 14).

¹⁰ For a discussion of processes of Hinduisation and Sankritisation in east Nepal see Jones (1976).

policy did exist during this period “was quite plainly designed to maintain in power a regime which saw as its only role the collection of agricultural taxes and the prevention of disorder by any section of the populace ” (Caplan 1970: 8).

During his trip to Europe in 1850, the first Rana Prime Minister, Jung Bahadur Rana, appears to have been particularly impressed with the English system of education, an interest which led him to establish the Durbar School for sons of the Rana rulers on his return to Kathmandu.¹¹ The desire for Western-style education for the ruling elite can be seen as motivated by a need to be able to engage with the British in India effectively in order to secure the position of the oligarchy in relation to regional politics, but also to provide their successors with knowledge gained in the West “to safeguard the Rana interest as against the public welfare” (Aryal 1977: 123). The ability to negotiate effectively with the powerful political force to the south was crucial for the continuation of the regime, in terms of maintaining at least nominal sovereignty over the territory of Nepali state and in preventing too much influence of external ideas. The curriculum offered was based on the English school model and had a strong arts focus. As Bista notes:

While Nepali language and Sanskrit were taught, little else of Nepal was introduced. The history or geography that was taught was confined to that of the British Isles and India, a practice that was to instil a sense of inferiority and ineffectiveness of things Nepali and a debasement of the ethnic heritage of the different Nepali peoples (Bista 1991: 119).

Those educated through this system found employment within the Rana administration due to their perceived greater knowledge and ability to negotiate with external powers. School education gradually became a prerequisite for taking up a position in government and literacy came to symbolise political influence and social prestige (Caplan 1970, Bista 1991). Significantly, the required skills of those within the civil service were predominantly subservience, rather than innovation. Indeed, as Mihaly notes, “innovation and enterprise were not only unwanted qualities: they were dangerous” (1965: 15). Access to and content of schooling were thus tightly controlled to ensure the promotion of loyalty to the elite and maintenance of the existing order, rather than promoting debate and potential dissent.

¹¹ Indeed, it appears that he also wished some of his sons to go to England to attend school there, but as the special privileges he demanded could not be met by the British Government, this idea was dropped (Aryal 1977:123). After the death of Jung Bahadur, the school was shifted from its original base in the Royal Palace to its present location opposite Rani Pokhari, and admission was extended to the children of other Ranas. Low caste children were not taught, partly because of the fear of what may result from widespread access to educational opportunities, but also because the high caste teachers refused to accept them as students (Caplan 1970: 9).

There was very little change in the sphere of education, save for the introduction of a few additional centres for the study of Sanskrit, until the relatively moderate Dev Shumshere became Prime Minister in 1901. Under his leadership the regime began, for the first time, to consider extending educational opportunities to the children of the country as a whole, with the introduction of a plan to provide one teacher for every community with 50 school age children (Aryal 1977: 123-4). Schooling was to include instruction in writing, reading and arithmetic as well as history and geography, and textbooks and other reading materials were to be provided free to students. However, such a move was regarded as a significant threat to other powerful members of the ruling elite, with considerable suspicion and fear still associated with the effect the growing awareness of the people could have on the ability of the Ranas to maintain order and secure their continued economic prosperity (CERID 1999: 1). Consequently, after only 118 days in power, Dev Shumshere was forced into exile in India and his younger brother, the considerably more conservative Chandra Shumshere, took over the Prime Ministership.

Under the rule of Chandra Shumshere, the focus of education was limited once again to the perceived needs of the elite, though this itself was tempered by perceptions of the risks associated with the provision of certain forms of education and particularly with travel to foreign countries. In 1902 sons of members of the aristocracy were sent to Japan to receive a grounding in technical education “to check the progress of liberal and popular education” (Aryal 1977:124). However, concern was raised not only about the form of education being provided to these young men, but also the dangers associated with the contact they had with impure, non-Hindu peoples. As Landon noted:

In permitting the spread of knowledge [the Prime Minister] found opposed to him the traditional obscurantism or at least the jealous exclusiveness of a religion which had its roots deep not only in the minds but in the hearts of his countrymen. It required patience and tact to overcome this opposition, and the expense of sending these young students to Japan was enormously increased by the precautions that had to be taken for the due observance in the last detail of caste regulations during the journey and their residence in Japan (Landon 1976 [1926]: 179-80).

When a request was made in 1905 that some students be sent to study in Europe or America the advisory council to the Prime Minister “advised against this scheme and suggested that it would be better to invite the help of Indian experts” (Landon 1976 [1926]: 180). Thus the ideas associated with the purity of the Hindu state and the need to maintain a sense of ritual separation in order to maintain political and social separation between Nepal and the

'outside' as well as *within* the state, were reinforced through the attitude of the regime to the provision of education.

The dual attitude to the 'external', which counters this fear of impurity with a sense of the need to comply with and even mimic the interests of the British in India is, however, also evident at this time. Indeed, what little attempt Chandra Shumshere made to advance education more widely within the country was done, Aryal claims, "only to keep the British power in India in good humour". For example, the opening of Trichandra College in 1918, ostensibly as a tribute to King Tribhuvan, "can be imagined to be the result of his meeting with George V during the Emperor's visit in India, when Sir Chandra Shumshere got from him a slight hint that Nepal lacked in development" (Aryal 1977: 125). The unease with which this decision was viewed by the Prime Minister and the ruling group more generally is, however, highlighted in the popular tale that "Chandra Shumshere, retiring to his palace after the opening ceremony of the [Trichandra] College, described it as the foundation stone of the graveyard for the Ranas" (*ibid.*).

The language policy adopted by the Ranas also highlights the tension between the Ranas and their powerful southern neighbour. There was considerable interest in emulating the English-medium education system, yet there was recognition of the importance of language as a significant means of differentiating between the two countries, a distinction which became more important to emphasise as the 'closure' of Nepal became increasingly difficult to maintain. Thus 300 vernacular schools were in the early 1900s as a mechanism through which to promote the Nepali language. This move was further reinforced in 1934 when Nepali was declared the official language of all educational institutions and the medium in which the School Leaving Certificate was to be conducted. It is notable that this move was made at a time of increased activity against the ruling groups in India, and was thus a clear attempt to differentiate and distance the Nepali polity from this and secure the continuation of Rana rule. However, despite such measures, it proved impossible to isolate Nepal from the "ideas and political ferment of modern India" (Mihaly 1965: 16).

Resisting Rana Rule

As will be further highlighted in later sections of this chapter, examining state education policy and attempts to construct a particular vision of the nation through schooling provide only a partial picture of the role of education within a given context. Thus the disjuncture between state policy and the actual experience of life under the Ranas requires some

discussion. In particular the contradictions in the attitude taken to the 'external', and the denial of the movement of people resulted ultimately in the emergence of untenable cleavages within the society.

As noted above, attempts by the Ranas to control social dissent resulted in the strict prohibition of teaching of even basic literacy skills, with harsh penalties for those caught engaging in teaching and learning activities. However, as an elderly Gurung man noted during my own fieldwork, "some people *were* learning by writing on the floor in houses, but if people were found to be reading or writing then the Ranas would cut their hands off, so people were often too scared to study" (f/n: 1/3/00). Whether such violent punishment did take place or not is unclear, yet there was clearly genuine fear of the Ranas in areas where they had an active presence. However, even in such areas, covert teaching and learning still managed to take place. This gradual expansion of educational opportunities gathered pace with the inflow of knowledge and expertise from those who had travelled out from Nepal, either to escape Rana oppression or to seek employment, and the continued transfer of ideas and people across the porous Indo-Nepali border.¹²

The period during and immediately after World War II was a time of considerable unease among the Ranas, with the return of servicemen and the consequent spread of ideas about alternative ways of life and styles of government as well as the spread of basic literacy by these returning soldiers. This uncertainty manifested itself in swings in the position taken on education policy by the regime. Until he was forced to resign in 1945, Juddha Shumshere introduced educational reforms, including the opening of new schools and the provision of grants-in-aid to schools opened by public initiative which had been granted permission by the Director General of Public Instruction (Wood 1965: 126-128). Following Indian independence in 1947, further external pressure was exerted to try to introduce change in Nepal, leading to the introduction of 'Basic Education', purportedly along the lines of the Gandhian model. However, genuine interest in pursuing this was limited and sufficient resources were not made available. Thus it remained a shift in name only, rather than the provision of new opportunities for the general population. The wish to maintain Nepal as an

¹² As Woods highlights, "Some of the people in the *terrai* area brought in teachers from India and, in defiance of the Ranas, opened schools for their children. The teachers were paid mostly in kind — rice, clothing, etc. — which they collected every Saturday from their patrons" (Wood 1965: 22). Such an influx of ideas was further precipitated by the increasingly vocal group of Nepalis exiled by the Ranas, who were able to gain high levels of education during their time in India and use the emerging community as a basis for mobilisation against the ruling regime. See also Dart's (1973) discussion of the "rub of culture" along the Indo-Nepal border.

'isolated' and consequently 'pure' Hindu state became increasingly untenable, as did the position of the Ranas within it, although they did attempt to propagate the 'myth' of isolation and their own superiority for as long as possible.¹³ The growing cross-border transfer of knowledge and political ideas, particularly from the Nepali Congress party activists in exile in India, became gradually more difficult for the regime to control and ultimately contributed to the overthrow of the oligarchy in 1950.¹⁴ However, the ending of Rana domination of the Nepali polity did not lead to a corresponding reduction in the political use of schooling to legitimate and secure the positions of particular interest groups. Rather the form and content of educational provision shifted in order to support the position adopted by the new system.

Emerging from Darkness: Experiments with Democracy (1951-60)

The image of Nepal as being closed off or 'isolated' from the rest of the world during the Rana oligarchy is one which strongly influenced the post-revolution government's attempt to reconstruct the 'idea of Nepal' in such a way as to legitimise their position, with the post 1950 period represented as a time of 'opening up' to the outside world.¹⁵ Indeed, due to the somewhat uneasy coalition of groups involved in the overthrow of the Rana oligarchy,¹⁶ the only way that a semblance of unity among the ruling groups could be presented was through the use of the previous regime as a marker against which to define and legitimate the new vision of 'statehood'. Consequently, the past isolation is also equated with stagnation and lack of change,¹⁷ in contrast to the more dynamic, 'developing' path to be taken by the state in the new period of apparent openness. Democracy, modernity and the interconnection between Nepal and the rest of the world became the clarion calls with which the new leadership hoped to gain the support of its newly defined 'citizens', with visible changes such as the initiation of highway building projects, the construction of an airport, development of telecommunication links and the arrival of the first tourists to the country

¹³ Attempts were made by Mohan Shumshere in 1948 to suspend civil liberties and discourage education.

¹⁴ An abortive coup attempt in 1940 led by Indian-educated Nepalis was the first of a series of high profile attempts to topple the existing system. This led ultimately to a concerted military attack on the ruling oligarchy from Indian soil in 1950, notably with the assistance of disaffected lower ranking members of the Rana family.

¹⁵ This view also permeates and influences the way development agencies constructed the Nepali nation and formed the basis for the justification of intervention (Fujikura 1996).

¹⁶ In the early 1950s an alliance was formed between the Nepali Congress and the Ranas, with each group having 7 representatives in the government, with the King returning to the throne and forming the third element of the coalition, with each party having conflicting visions of how the state should be conceptualised.

¹⁷ Indeed, Tony Wheeler, in the 1973 Lonely Planet publication *West Asia on a Shoestring*, states that "Nepalese history is really non-history. While things were happening elsewhere they weren't in Nepal, which accounts for the way things are today" (Wheeler 1973: 190 cited in Liechty 1997: 7-8n) See also Onta (1997) for discussion of the construction of Nepal as a "fossil land".

reinforcing this vision of a change in approach. Education, which had become a marker of status and prestige and, ultimately, a symbol of the elitism of the Rana period, was also used by the new government to highlight the shift in the relationship between the state and 'the people'. Education, and the village primary school in particular, became a symbol of the new vision of the Nepali state, as well as an important medium through which to promote it.

The period immediately following the 1950 revolution saw a rapid growth in the number of educational institutions, with wealthier individuals and communities taking the initiative themselves to establish schools and to make more visible the tutoring that had been taking place covertly under the previous regime.¹⁸ However, the pace of this change, the location of schools and the content and form of classroom practice were not formalised or monitored by the government, which had no effective administrative structures in place at this stage.¹⁹ While a Ministry of Education was established in 1951, it was only in 1953, with the assistance of the United States Overseas Mission (USOM), that a more systematic approach to planning the educational development in the country was introduced and the new vision of Nepal gradually became more forcefully presented. The proponents of the Nepal National Education Plan (NEPC 1955) envisaged that schooling should cease to be the site of disparate interests as it became more systematically administered and national in character, and would assist in the promotion of a single vision of national development.

Nepal as a Modern, Democratic, 'Developing' State

The vision of Nepal presented in the post-Rana period emphasised the more democratic and 'enlightened' nature of the newly 'opened' state. Engagement with ideas of modernity and scientific and technological advancement were utilised as markers of the changed attitude and vision of the new leaders. For example, the Five Year Plan for Education of 1956, based on the ideas presented in the Nepal National Education Plan, expresses concern that "the encrustation of the rusts of centuries of ritualism have made the conservative minds least

¹⁸ Individuals would gain from such moves both financially, through the provision of donations in kind in return for schooling, and through the securing of their status as local patrons.

¹⁹ Under the Ministry of Education each of the 7 Zones of the country had an Office of the Divisional Inspector of Schools. In 1958 an Office of the District Inspector of Schools was created in the 28 districts of the country. These offices were given, at least *de jure*, complete authority over the secondary and primary schools of the district. In 1960 the administration was extended down to the Block level in a major reorganisation of the governmental structure. The country was divided into 14 Zones and 75 Blocks for the purpose of administering public works. The MOE inspectorate system adapted to this new structure, with a Zonal Education Officer responsible for secondary education in the Zone, a Block Development Office and a school Sub-Inspector appointed to look after primary education. The Sub Inspector was responsible to the Block Development Office, not the MOE: the Ministry was not the responsible line agency at the district level (Master Plan Team 1997: 123ff.).

receptive and responsive to science” (MOE 1956: 3). The language of modernity and the new international discourse of development became the medium through which Nepal’s relationship with other states and global agencies could be articulated. De Chene (1996) characterises the period since 1951 as the “Third *Ekikaran*” (unification) of Nepal, representing the country’s “unification with the rest of the world through the advent of modernity” (De Chene 1996: 263). This must be seen in relation to the previous *ekikaran*, firstly the territorial integration and administrative unification of the Nepali state under Prithvi Narayan Shah and, secondly, the “emotional unification” of the country as a result of Bhanubhakta Acharya’s translation of the Ramayana into simple Nepali and the subsequent spread of the Nepali language.²⁰ In both these instances of effective hegemony, De Chene claims, “small groups became the brokers of power and influence”, a process which can be said to have continued through the post-Rana period as part of this most recent unification (*ibid.*) Following its ‘incarceration’ by the Ranas:

Nepal was to be restored to its former glory, not through renewed territorial expansion, but by entering the modern age, achieving a ‘developed’ state. Politically and administratively the Third *Ekikaran* required new, modern forms (parliamentary structure, civil service bureaucracy, UN membership, etc.) but as a means of state unification — a means for a few to control the country from the centre and to manage its relations with the rest of the world — its goals remained consonant with those of past rulers (De Chene 1996: 263-4).

As well as utilising the rhetoric of development, the Nepali state began to engage actively with the new international apparatus of foreign aid, accepting funding from bilateral donors such as India and China, who had strategic, geopolitical interests in involvement, and the United States which regarded assistance, particularly to areas thought to help reduce poverty, as a means to contain the spread of communism in the context of the Cold War. (See Mihaly (1965) for a discussion of foreign aid to Nepal in this early period.) The concept of development (*bikas*) and engagement with external sources of financing increasingly became the mechanism through which the position of the Nepali state came to be understood in relation to the rest of the world. As Pigg notes, “development — rather than the residue scars of imperialism — is the overt link between it and the West. *Bikas* is the term through which Nepalis understand their relationship to other parts of the world” (Pigg 1992: 497).²¹

²⁰ Ranjan (2001) presents a discussion of the impact of Acharya’s work on the spread of stories and religious scripts, and presents a selection of his poetry.

²¹ This vision of Nepal as only opening to the outside world in 1950 was also utilised by the development agencies as a basis for justifying intervention, with Nepal seen as a “development

Constructing the state in relation to the concept of development, and with a specific emphasis on greater engagement with external agencies, had a significant impact on the extent to which a nationalist, unique path of development could be explored and how far decision-making would be constrained by international expectations and pressures. In part, the greater openness of the state to the 'external' necessitated the promotion of a stronger sense of national identity as a means of legitimating state control, which had previously been achieved through force. Significantly, the dependence on Indian mediation in the early 1950s to negotiate agreements between the tripartite government provided a basis for the promotion of a common identity within the diverse population and, notably, also the divided polity. As Mihaly notes:

Because the Kingdom had never been colonised, there had previously been no focus for nationalism. Now India, resented by those who foresaw the failure of their hopes for the country and — in the case of politicians who did not get into office — for themselves, provided the required focus (Mihaly 1965: 22).

Using this anti-Indian focus as a basis for promoting a unified vision of Nepal further contributed to the need to present the state in a way which allowed for greater international assistance in order to counterbalance this dependency on India. Drawing on Clignet's (1971) distinction between the formation of a "particularist elite" with deep roots in the local society and a "universalist elite able to converse and compete freely with their counterparts in other countries of the world", Wood argues that in the case of Nepal the "presence of foreign technicians, educators and advisors, ignorant of the demands of the local history, pretty well guarantee the latter course of events" (Wood 1973: 18). Indeed, Wood, an educator from the University of Oregon, took a leading role in the development of the formal education system in Nepal, a project which allowed him to test the answers he had given in his doctoral examination, when he had been asked how he would develop an education system "suited to the twentieth century" in "a small state ... where for some reason there are no educational facilities" (Wood 1987, cited in Fujikura 1996: 271). The influence of Wood highlights the tensions which emerged between the need to engage with development and foreign aid to differentiate the new government from the Ranas, and the need to develop a unique Nepali identity to legitimate the new regime and define it as distinct from India.

In addition, the dominant position of the ruling elite (Indian-educated, generally high caste Hindu men) was maintained and even strengthened through the use of this rhetoric, with the

laboratory", a "blank slate" and a "textbook opportunity" to try out new approaches to social reform and aid provision (Fujikura 1996).

idea of development and modernity coming to shape intra-national identities and relationships (Shrestha 1995). *Bikas* thus becomes “the idiom through which the relationship between local communities and other places is expressed” (Pigg 1992: 499). A discourse explicitly advocating equality and inclusion sets up as its implicit referent a specific model and vision of what it is to be modern or developed, a discursive move which has significant implications in terms of how inequality is dealt with in practice. This will be explored in more detail throughout the later stages of this chapter and in the discussion of experiences of schooling in the contemporary context presented in Chapter 6.

Expanding Schooling: A Symbol of Nepal’s Modernity and Development

The opening up of education opportunities and the development of a ‘national’ education system was therefore used to mark the shift in vision the state had of its relationship both with its citizens and with the outside world. Promoting schooling became both a symbol of the modern, developing nation and a medium through which to transmit this revised vision of the state to the populace. As Caplan has noted:

In practical terms, a programme to build schools in every corner of the country could be implemented in a relatively short time, which meant that results were highly visible, and the resources required, however great, were by and large available locally, so that reliance on external assistance was minimal. As a result, such a programme became an exercise in national self help, and the numbers of educational institutions established each year the measure of the nation’s progress (Caplan 1970: 8).²²

In the education policies developed in the 1950s, notably those stemming from the National Education Planning Commission (NEPC) Report of 1955 and the *Five Year Plan for Education* which was based on this (MOE 1956), a strong connection between education, the “emerging from darkness” and the “enlightenment” gained by being connected with the outside world is emphasised.²³ Education is thus seen as an essential tool in enabling both the country and the individual to deal with the challenges of having become more explicitly part of the international community:

We have become part of the world, whether we like it or not. We can no longer remain isolated; the world has come to us. How can we meet this world without education? Must we — who once were the crossroads of civilisation — bow

²² The increase in the number of schools in Nepal since 1950 is striking, rising from 321 in 1950 to 10,130 in 1980 and 23,702 in 1994 (NPC 1996, BPEP 1997).

²³ For example, the NEPC Report notes how, “In Nepal reside an industrious, eager, willing people, who have only recently gotten a hold on their bootstraps and are now pulling themselves out of the mire of the Dark Ages of the recent centuries. The mud is thick, the pull is long and the load is heavy” (NEPC 1955: 2/20).

our heads in shame to our worldly visitors? How can we evaluate the ‘gifts’ that are offered us — ideologies, new customs, inventions and the ways of a new strange world? How can we protect ourselves against slogans and ideologies detrimental to the interests of our country? We can do none of these without education to give us understanding and strength to lead us (MOE 1956: 2).

This increased connection with the outside world was also related, as highlighted in the education policy discourse, to the necessity of having a strong national character to the state, with education envisaged as a crucial medium through which this could be disseminated. Indeed, it was felt that “schools and educational systems exist solely for the purpose of helping the youth of a nation to become better integrated into their society” (NEPC 1955: 14/1).

But in what image was this emerging national identity constructed, and what form of education was consequently encouraged? As noted above, the ‘democratic’ nature of the new government clearly staked out the difference between it and the previous regime, and was the basis upon which it claimed legitimacy. Education was therefore viewed as a channel through which democracy could be strengthened and individuals enabled to participate in the process of government, with the relatively rapid expansion of schools throughout the country a visible and potent symbol of the new relationship between the state and ‘the people’. Participation in schooling was portrayed as a way of supporting the national projects of democracy and development and providing the means through which people could “work for the good causes of the nation”. As the NEPC stressed, “Education is the *sin-qua-non* [sic] of success of democracy... if ignorance and illiteracy remain for a long time, democracy will spell doom and disaster. Here is one opportunity for the sons of Nepal to come forward and fight against darkness and bring light in the country” (NEPC 1955: ii).²⁴

Yet, while the ‘national’ character of the new education system is continually stressed by the NEPC — reference is made to the plan as the ‘Nepal National Education Plan’, to ‘National Schools’, and a ‘National Curriculum’ (NEPC 1955: 7/2) — this nation is founded on the unity, that is the similarity, of the people living within its boundaries. Talk of integration is marred by the use of an implicit, highly specific referent as the basis on which unity is to be understood, a move which limits the extent to which ‘difference’ can be valued. This is

²⁴ The ‘daughters’ of Nepal were not to be excluded from this process. The NEPC noted that as the country was facing a critical period in history, “every son and daughter of Nepal should be educated to know these problems of ours and be ready to meet them and help solve them” (NEPC 1955: 8/2).

particularly clearly highlighted in relation to the question of the appropriate language of instruction, with local language use regarded as detrimental to the project of strengthening the Nepali nation-state. A policy explicitly advocating the marginalisation of the different ethnic languages spoken within the state was introduced on the basis that:

The study of a non-Nepali *local* tongue would mitigate against the effective development of Nepali... If the younger generation is taught to use Nepali as the basic language then other languages will gradually disappear and greater national strength and unity will result (NEPC 1955: 8/2).

The Plan notes the existing “mania for English education” (NEPC 1955: 5/6) and the priority given to people who have received such schooling in terms of government service opportunities. Consequently, it was proposed that no Hindi or English be taught, despite parental interest in this, as the country’s language problem was not to be further aggravated by the “spread of multi-lingualism in the primary schools”.²⁵ From class 6 onwards it is regarded as acceptable to begin teaching other languages, as by this stage “Nepali can be firmly established” (NEPC 1955: 8/12). Thus from 1959, with the adoption of a national primary school curriculum, Nepali became the compulsory medium of instruction for classes one to five (Onta 1996: 217).

This highlights how, alongside the ‘opening-up’ of Nepal to the global community, an implicit valuation of ‘the external’ over ‘the local’, both within the country and in regard to contact with influences from beyond the national borders, with the external seen as more ‘enlightened’ than the local. This valuation is explicitly pointed to in the NEPC vision of the relationship between ‘the village’ and Kathmandu:

If the city is the brain of a country, the village is the heart, and it is the heart that supplies strength to the brain; the fresh fruits, the tasteful foodgrains, and the green vegetables supplied by the villages make the city which is their brain-centre invigorating (NEPC 1955: 20/A-4).

The school curriculum reinforces this valuation, with a move from an emphasis on “life in school and at home” in class 1 to “life outside Nepal” as a feature of the class 5 social studies curriculum as a means of providing for “the gradual expansion of the child’s vision from his immediate to as broad a world outlook as possible” (NEPC 1955: 8/9). Thus the more

Girls were considered to be “homemakers and citizens” and as such needed education as much as boys in order to fulfil these roles.

²⁵ There was concern that if Hindi or English were offered “many parents would feel that their children should study them as evidence of erudition, even though they had no practical value” (NEPC 1955: 8/12).

educated children are, the more acquainted they become with places outside of their locale. Conversely, there is an impression that those who are uneducated remain confined to the local.

This perception also permeated down to practice at the school level and people's valuation of themselves and their communities. People from 'outside' — from the nearest bazaar town or further afield — were invited to teach in the newly formed village schools, despite the fact that members of the community may have had equivalent skills. Pigg (1992) discusses how this idea developed throughout the post 1951 period, referring to the creation in popular discourse of a monolithic Nepali 'village' which is seen as a site of 'backwardness' and 'tradition' in opposition to the development and modernity of places which are not 'the village' and are not 'local'. The content of schooling reinforced this vision, with a considerable rift emerging between local knowledges about, for example, health and cleanliness and the advice presented about desirable practices by teachers. In his discussion of the spread of schooling in the east of Nepal, Upreti highlights the conflicting views of cleanliness which emerged after the arrival of a science teacher from Darjeeling in the local school. He highlights the way secular ideas were promoted through schools. He notes, for example, that while *ganga jal* (water from the river Ganges) had previously been considered the holiest of all the holy waters, after remonstrations from the science teacher, for "my generation its value was determined on the basis of hygiene rather than holiness" (Upreti 1976: 48).²⁶

One cannot discuss the emergence of Nepal's education system without reference to the extensive external (non-Nepali) influence on the development of national education policy. The NEPC, and all major education policy documents prepared through the 1950s and 60s, were devised with the financial and technical assistance of USOM / USAID. Many of the decisions relating to schooling policy were made in light of the experiences of the United States, as a press release, quoting the USAID advisor Hugh B. Wood, from March 1954 highlights:

Dr Wood expressed his views on the problem of the medium of instruction in primary education. He said that two hundred years before, the very problem had started them in the face in the United States of America, which at that time

²⁶ Shrestha (1995) discusses the impact of 'development' on his own sense of identity and status, highlighting the impact of the arrival of the first Peace Corps Volunteers in his home village and the differentiation between those who could speak English and those who could not. As will be shown in relation to schooling in the contemporary context (Chapter 6), this high valuation of 'the external' continues to influence intra- and inter-state relations today.

had a multiplicity of spoken languages: but that after the War of Independence, English was given due prominence as the medium of instruction and that today there was no problem of language there. Without laying any emphasis on minor local languages, Dr Wood referred to the three fold benefit of giving prominence to one language; first, it strengthened national unity; secondly, it economised books and teachers; and thirdly, little boys and girls were apt to learn other languages quicker than when they were fully grown up. Therefore, he added that if primary education was imparted in a national language they would begin to understand it better from their very childhood [sic](reproduced in NEPC 1955: 20/A-2).

From these early attempts at building an integrated, national system of education, it is clear that the reliance on foreign aid and the use of the rhetoric of development as a basis for nation building meant that external influence on both the structure and content of schooling provision was considerable since the very inception of a 'national' programme of education.

Yet, despite these changes in policy and the establishment of new structures for the administration of education at the central level, the impact in terms of access to school at the local level and the actual control the state had over individual schools was rather limited. The continued conflict between the Ranas, Nepali Congress and the King throughout the 1950s limited the effective implementation of policies and resulted in the rather slow construction of a state infrastructure at the local level, particularly in more remote areas. Education expansion thus continued in a largely unplanned and uncontrolled manner, contrary to the policy emphasis on the extension of a national, unified system (Ragsdale 1989, Onta 1996). Indeed, in 1960 the Education Minister was still concerned about the "great intermixture of the various systems in the educational structure of the country" and believed that "a democratic national system of education is the imperative need of the hour" (quoted in Onta 1996: 217). In addition, despite the undoubted expansion of educational opportunities to a wider section of the population, barriers prevented the participation of particular groups, leading to the "unequal ability" of the populace to take advantage of the new facilities (Caplan 1970).²⁷ This inability to curb the uncontrolled expansion of diverse educational institutions led to calls for a more interventionist approach to ensure that the state's vision of educational and broader national development could be pursued, a policy which became more practical to implement as political differences were quashed and large

²⁷ Caplan notes that this has a knock on effect in terms of access to economic opportunities. "Traditional cleavages based on occupational specialisation in relation to land, and of course on ritual evaluations under the Hindu caste scheme are being widened because low castes are now denied access to new economic opportunities which carve to those with basic educational standards" (Caplan 1970: 9)

scale infrastructural development projects were undertaken, such as the construction of the East-West highway and the opening up of greater telecommunication links.

Ek Bhasa, Ek Bhash, Ek Desh: National education and the Panchayat Era

Following almost a decade of struggle and tension between the Nepali Congress party and the monarchy over the locus of legitimate power in the post Rana period, the King eventually disbanded the party system in a royal coup in December 1960, declaring the “experiment with multi-party democracy” a failure. In its place the *panchayat* system of governance was developed which would, it was claimed, promote a particularly Nepali style of government. This reconstituting of the state to legitimate the increased power of the monarchy entailed a further revisioning of the relationship between the population of the state and the system of governance. As Burghart notes:

By the 1960s the government was claiming that the Nepalese people were a culturally unique people, whose governmental institutions of kingship and elected councils (*panchayats*) were an expression of popular will and whose political boundaries were determined by the territorial distribution of the people. Such a definition of the polity accords with the modern concept of the nation-state and served the king of Nepal as a means of legitimating — before other governments as well as his own citizens — the continuing political autonomy of his kingdom and the perpetuation of his pre-eminent role in a ‘uniquely Nepalese’ form of government (Burghart 1996: 227).

Under the Rana regime intra-national differences had been recognised through a codified, hierarchical caste structure. The approach taken to the diversity of the Nepali population during the *panchayat* period was far more integrationist, focusing on unity around a common culture. Such an approach to the governance of the nation-state was based on tightly organised management and control of intra-national ‘difference’, with strict boundaries imposed on how diverse interests could be expressed.²⁸ Ethnic differences were given little official recognition, with public organisations being required to fit within particular categories of “class organisations” which were approved by the government: political parties and ethnic-based groups were explicitly excluded from this.²⁹

Despite the nationalistic rhetoric and the forceful propagation of an ‘official’ Nepali nationalism “through state owned print and radio media and, most forcefully, through the

²⁸ Adhikary (1996) discusses the Nepalisation of place names in the name of *bikas* and within the broader *panchayat* project of creating a unified, unitary national culture.

²⁹ Five class organisations were recognised — farmers, women, workers, youth, and ex-servicemen — and all organisations had to be recognised and fit into one of these categories if they were to be deemed legitimate groups under the *panchayat* system (Borgstrom 1980).



standardisation of school level educational textbooks since the early 1960s” (Onta 1996: 38), the vision of Nepal presented was still very consciously constructed and legitimated in relation to images of ‘the external’. In addition, with the increasing involvement of development agencies and external financing of activities, the nation-state had to be legible to the international community. This required the state to be presented as the provider of key services, such as health, water and education services, to the population and to demonstrate a legitimate claim to represent their interests. Showing a commitment to increasing the physical trappings of development and to engaging with the economic and social reforms advocated at the global level was thus an important mechanism through which the monarchy and *panchayat* model of government could enhance their popular support within the country and the external support required to ensure the required financial backing for initiatives. In addition, in the era of decolonisation of the 1960s and 1970s, the ability to claim a common culture and identity within the nation-state became a particularly poignant marker of legitimacy on the world stage (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1999: 56).

This focus on development and ‘modernity’ also served to legitimate the position of the political elites and their attempts to assimilate different groups within a particular vision of the nation-state through the interlinked processes of ‘Nepalisation’ and ‘modernisation’. As Pfaff-Czarnecka highlights:

during the *panchayat* period, the cultural language of the dominant Hindu elite emerged as the *language of modernisation*. Since the high-caste elites were able to establish themselves as brokers between international allies / donors and Nepalese society, they could claim that ‘their’ cultural symbols and means of expression were a successful means of progress in the national context (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1997: 435-6, emphasis in original).

The slogan which most succinctly encompasses the *panchayat* era vision of the Nepali nation-state was ‘*ek bhasa, ek bhash, ek dhash*’ (one language, one dress, one nation). Its promotion translated in practice into the forceful presentation of one particular vision of the nation which served to legitimate the position of the political elites both to an internal audience and in the eyes of the international community.

The education sector was regarded as a crucial tool in ensuring the promotion of this image and was therefore used by the *panchayat* regime in two distinct ways. Firstly, schools, both as a physical space and in terms of the curriculum promoted through them, were regarded as a medium through which to propagate a particular vision of the Nepali nation from Kathmandu to the remotest areas of the country. School texts highlighted the

'backwardness' of villages, and ethnic, rural and non-Hindu groups were marginalised and placed in an inferior position to the lifestyles and customs of high caste, Kathmandu living citizens (Pigg 1992, Pfaff-Czarnecka 1999). Secondly, the focus on education helped legitimate the dominant position of the political elites by associating the traits of these groups with 'development': one cultural form was presented as holding out the opportunity to move beyond a state of 'underdevelopment' (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1999: 59). The construction of education as a symbol of progress and modernity, coupled with the strong emphasis given to the modern over the non-modern, thus cast their position in terms of merit — they were 'educated' — in a society where, at least *de jure*, caste and family privilege had ceased to be a legitimate basis for maintaining positions of power.

Initially, education policy continued in much the same way as had been envisaged by the 1955 NEPC, with education being seen as a mechanism which would encourage people to unite around the goal of national development and which would enable Nepal to play a more significant role in the international community. Significantly, there was no overt move in education policy to distance the *panchayat* regime from the previous system. The *Objectives of the Five Year Plan for Education* (MOE 1965) acknowledge the continuity with the post-revolution period, but stress that the move to end the party structure will allow a more Nepali style of government to emerge, more in tune with the needs of the populace. As the Plan notes:

Nepal has been striving, since 1951, to bring about the overall economic and social development of her people. In the past fifteen years her efforts have been directed towards the provision of decent minimum standards of living which would be comparable with that of the advanced nations of the world. The 'total development' of the country depends largely on education (MOE 1965: 1).

The Rana regime remained the central focus of attack and the basis against which the regime defined itself, with the primary curriculum including time for "discussions on the drawbacks of the Rana regime, with special reference to the freedom of speech, schools for children, facilities to the people (recreation), blind obedience, etc" (MOE 1968: 28).

The All Round National Education Committee, established in 1961, did however introduce slight revisions to the previous school curriculum, including the inclusion of the biographies of national heroes, patriots and martyrs and lessons on *rajbhakti* (service to the monarchy), with the latter serving "to help legitimate the assumption of autocratic power by the king" (Onta 1996: 218). In addition, with an increasingly tightly-knit system of political and social control throughout the country, the *panchayat* government was more able to enforce policy

implementation in schools than the initial post-Rana regime.³⁰ This tighter administrative system, with an organisational structure that extended down to the village level, ensured the state was more able to enforce change in public behaviour.³¹ Thus when, in 1961, it was made compulsory both to sing the national anthem at the beginning of each school day in all educational establishments and to display the King's portrait in all school premises, the infrastructure existed to ensure such decrees were enforced. Indeed, singing of the national anthem and *rastriya git* (national songs) gradually displaced saying a prayer to Saraswati, which had been how the school day began in the 1950s. As Onta notes, "generating 'a feeling of national unity and solidarity' by making students recite early in the morning words that evoked grand images of the Nepali nation had become more important than praying to Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of learning" (Onta 1996: 219).

Efforts were thus made to promote a greater sense of cohesion and integration in the project of national development. Consequently, by the late 1960s there was a greater degree of uniformity in curricula and school books than at any point previously (Onta 1996: 219). Yet, discontent continued to be expressed, with dissatisfaction with the education system one of the factors which led students in particular to challenge the government's stance. In addition, by the late 1960s concern had emerged among the ruling elite, fuelled by the need to address international donor interests and priorities, that the education which was on offer was not appropriate to the needs of national development, in relation both to the promotion of national unity and economic development. A team of UNESCO advisors, for example, expressed disquiet at the rapid growth of liberal arts colleges and the unrestricted increase in college enrolment, and recommended a more concerted focus on professional and technically oriented training (Wood and Knall 1962, see also Upraity 1982). As Ragsdale explains, "Nepal's small, elitist system of education had been expanded without regard for its suitability to the country's needs", leading to its functioning as a 'psychosocial adornment' rather than offering a system which produced citizens able to contribute to the country's economic development (Ragsdale 1989: 15).

Attempts to rectify this, and to bring the system more in line with emerging donor interests in technical and vocationally-oriented education, created resentment and increased opposition to the *panchayat* system, notably from students who saw opportunities for

³⁰ As one interviewee noted "the system was so strict, with many restrictions and it wasn't possible to say any word against the government. If the police heard of any dissent then the person who had tried to oppose the authorities was arrested. Automatically teachers and students were afraid" (f/n:27/2/00).

advancement foreclosed. For example, in an attempt to limit the numbers of arts and commerce graduates and encourage involvement in more vocationally-oriented sectors, a failure rate of 80% was introduced for university and college courses in these areas, a move which angered students and increased the resistance to the regime (Caplan 1970: 10). In addition, students highlighted the lack of employment opportunities available to those with relatively high levels of education, raising fears about the validity of the linkage between improved education and economic development which had informed much of the government's policies and vision of national development. Such dissatisfaction spread wider than just the education sector, with disquiet increasingly expressed over the way that the state, which had set itself up as the locus of development and modernisation, was unable to match this with actual reform for the mass of the population (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1999: 60). By the late 1960s discontent with the *panchayat* system was growing among the (now underground) political party activists, students and more widely, leading the regime to take a more aggressive stance in order to promote the merits of the system. Here, again, schooling was used as one of the main mechanisms through which the idea of the *panchayat* as a particularly Nepali system of government and route to development could be reinforced. Thus, although educational institutions were a key source of unrest and dissent, presenting particular images of the state through schools remained one of the primary mechanisms through which the *panchayat* regime hoped to reassert its authority.

The National Education System Plan

The National Education System Plan (NESP) of 1971, perhaps the most politically significant education policy document to emerge in the post Rana period, was the central focus of this attempt to re-legitimize the *panchayat* regime. It represented a more aggressive attempt to mould the Nepali nation into a particular image, one which served the interests of the *panchayat* rulers. The NESP took the position that education should be based on the promotion of national unity and the assimilation of individuals into the mould of the Nepali nation-state, a state that had at its heart the *panchayat* model of government. As the goals of the NESP state, education was:

to strengthen devotion to crown, country, national unity and the *panchayat* system, to develop uniform traditions in education by bringing together various patterns under a single national policy, to limit the tradition of regional languages, to encourage financial and social mobility, and to fulfil manpower requirements essential for national development (MOE 1971: 1).

³¹ The regime, however, was not interested in challenging *private* behaviour, only that which directly and publicly threatened to disrupt the order of the regime (see Burghart 1996 pp300-318).

The significance of this shift is perhaps most clearly highlighted by comparing the position it takes with that of the earlier Plans. As Onta notes:

with respect to rhetorical differences, we might note that while the first plan [1955] talked about planning a national education 'suited to the genius of the people', the NESP aimed to produce a people via national education suited to the state and its agenda... in the former case, the nation as agent expresses its genius through the state's education plan while in the latter the state as agent builds the nation (Onta 1996:221).

The NEPC stressed that "the context of the curriculum must be adapted to the culture and needs of the people" (NEPC 1955: 8/6), whereas the NESP actively attempted to change the way individuals and groups viewed their 'culture' and their relationship with the state through the education system. As Mohammad Mohsin, one of the main architects of the Plan, emphasised:

Its over-all objective ... is to overhaul the inherited system of education and transform it into a potent and effective mechanism to synthesise diverse socio-economic interests, negotiate ethno-lingual heterogeneity and convert the geopolitical entity of Nepal into an emotionally integrated nationhood (Mohsin 1972: 35-6).

In part this move marked a growing confidence in the government's own capabilities, which resulted from the return of Nepali experts trained overseas. But it could also be read as an expression of concern over the impact that policies so tied up with international agendas were having on the ability of the ruling group to maintain their legitimacy and control over the various institutions of the state. Indeed, the NESP can be seen as "Nepal's declaration of independence from U.S. policy dominance" (Sellar 1981: 11). Since the 1950s there had been a considerable reliance on US financial and technical assistance in education sector reforms; they were the only major donor to the sector in this first 20 years of foreign aid support. Consequently, shifts in the donor country's aid policy and educational priorities had a significant impact on the form that education reform took in Nepal (Reed and Reed 1968, Sellar 1981).³² The NESP thus represents, at least in part, an attempt to challenge and break away from this pattern of influence, with some key features of the American-influenced system being overturned. For example, school management committees, which had been introduced in line with the U.S. experience of committee systems, were abolished under the new Plan (Reed and Reed 1968: 131-2, Master Plan Team 1997: 124). Schools were thus

³² From 1954-1975 USAID provided nearly US\$19 million to education projects in Nepal, including support to the Educational Materials Organisation, a focus on promoting universal primary education between 1954-67, and attempts to promote vocational education until 1971. The university sector

presented as government, as opposed to community institutions, drawing the school and the village firmly into the national project of development and allowing increased central control over teacher appointment and transfer.³³

The power of the NESP rhetoric, and of the *panchayat* regime more widely, lay the way that it promoted the idea that national unity based on sameness would provide a level playing field, that it would help promote social mobility and open up greater opportunities for the development of individuals as well as the state. However, the basis of this unity and the sameness to which all were to conform were modelled on, and thus privileged, specific segments of the society. The “triumvirate of official Nepali nationalism” (Onta 1996:38) — the monarchy, Hinduism and the Nepali language — provided the basis for this national culture with the first two collapsed into a powerful motif of the national culture “palatable to the dominant communities of Bahun and Chhettris, as well as to the elites among the Newars and other communities” (Shah 1993: 9 cited in Onta 1996: 38).

In terms of the curriculum promoted under the NESP, language was again stressed as a crucial factor in promoting the vision of a united Nepal, with 40% of teaching in the primary school to be devoted to Nepali language instruction. Again this represents a key dimension of national identity and unity, as conceived by the regime, with the emphasis on Nepali both differentiating the country from India and highlighting a marker of internal unity and ‘sameness’. In addition, while languages such as English, French, Russian, German, Japanese, Portuguese and Spanish could be taught as optional subjects in high school, only three of the ‘local’ languages of Nepal were included (Maithali, Newari and Bhojpuri), further emphasising the interest in downplaying the value of mother-tongue instruction and diversity while expressing the wish for Nepal to be a player on the world stage.

The NESP approach was also designed to bring the schooling system firmly into line with the economic development and labour force requirements of the country, with a strong vocational element to the curriculum introduced. As well as including vocational subjects such as poultry farming, metalwork, auto-mechanics and plumbing in the secondary school curriculum (MOE 1971: 27), dedicated technical schools were also established in a number

received support from India, with Tribhuvan University modelled largely on Patna University in Bihar (Upraity 1982: 5).

³³ A further rejection of the U.S. model was the reduction of primary schooling from five to three years, considerably reforming the previous system.

of areas.³⁴ Here, however, a key problem with the NESP initiative becomes apparent: despite the well-laid plans to increase the vocational element of instruction, without equipment or trained teachers it was impossible to implement the Plan successfully. Teachers at one school in my research site laughed as they explained how students at the school had been awarded points for typing courses, when they had never even seen a typewriter, while in another I heard tales of the kitchen equipment being kept locked up and unused, despite it having been brought in explicitly so that the school could provide training in catering.

Onta (1996, 1997) highlights how a particular vision of the *bir* (brave) Nepali nation was created in school textbooks during the *panchayat* period. Indeed, he goes as far as to say that this particular template of Nepali history, *rastriya itihas* (national history), and its teaching in schools was an important strand of official Nepali national culture under the *panchayat* system, “at the centre of the state-sponsored effort to make students into citizens socialised and loyal” to a specific vision of the nation (Onta 1996: 215). The picture presented, while claiming to be ‘national’ is, he claims, a very particular interpretation that serves to reinforce and legitimate the dominant position of the elite Hindu caste groups and the Shah monarchy. The valuation of high caste Hindu lifestyles and the culture of the urban elite over that of other groups within Nepal was further reinforced by modernisation discourses, and particularly the dominance of a dualistic vision of society, that is:

the idea that peripheral societies are divided into two sectors; a dynamic ‘modern’ sector which seeks and achieves integration within the global (economic) system; and a second ‘traditional’ and stagnating sector, devoid of links to the developed world. In striving to establish development ideals, the elite has promoted an image of villages as backward (Pigg 1992); traditional forms lived by non-Hindus are viewed as opposed to progress. Hence, imposing a process of ‘Nepalization’ has been understood, among other things, as a process of civilising a backward population. The majority of the ethnic population remained confined to the social periphery defined in those terms (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1997: 436).

Engagement in the project of development is thus defined as the major marker of social difference, and emphasis placed on the national, even universal, nature of this project and how it is potentially open to all who wish to participate.

³⁴ Pre-vocational training was introduced in lower secondary (class 4-7), with primary classes including sections on hygiene and handicraft production (MOE 1971: 24-25).

This idea of 'the modern' as that which emanated from the centre (i.e. from Kathmandu) was considerably reinforced by the NESP policy of bringing teachers from 'outside' to village schools as part of the National Development Service (NDS) that university students had to complete. Introduced in part to expand the development-oriented dimension of schooling and in part to extend further central control over rural areas, the NDS required all university students to spend a 10 month period engaged in rural development work in order to be awarded their degree (Yadav 1982:42). For example, the most respected teacher in one of the villages in Dhankuta had been sent to the area in 1973, while he was a student at Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu. His greater level of education, and thus his greater connection both spatially and ideologically with 'the modern', contributed to his attaining a high status within the community and to his opinions being sought in mediating local disputes.

While the NDS made a significant contribution to breaking the long-standing urban bias of the education system, the programme was the focus of resistance from students, particularly those who were from Kathmandu and had to travel out of the Kathmandu Valley for their NDS placement. As Acharya notes, "as the motivation of parents and of students for higher education is largely conditioned by its link with non-farm urban employment opportunities, the program was not readily welcomed in its initial phases" (1982: 56). The student strike of 1975, which expanded to include a series of political demands and marked the start of a concerted campaign against the *panchayat* system, was initiated around demands associated with their dissatisfaction with the NDS programme. With this growing unrest, the possibility that the presence of students in rural areas would lead to the rapid spread of dissent clearly concerned the government, and the programme was quietly abandoned.

This student unrest played a significant catalytic role in the move towards reinstating a multi-party system, with the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist Leninist) attempting to organise this discontent into a movement against the *panchayat* system in 1980 (Mikesell 1999: 100). While the movement was not in itself successful, a referendum was held to gauge popular support for the *panchayat* system, a vote which, amidst a high level of intimidation and ballot rigging (Mikesell 1999), was narrowly won by the ruling regime. Throughout the following decade, leading up to the *Jana Andolan* (People's Movement) of 1990, there were strikes and protests as the political parties became increasingly visible, with schools and colleges significant sites of protest and unrest. The teachers' strike of 1984-85, for instance, began as a pay dispute yet was quickly taken up by the two major outlawed political parties, the Nepali Congress and the various Communist Party factions, as a way to

further their popular base (Burghart 1996). A student protest in 1985, called as the result of the police firing on students in the classrooms of Kathmandu's Durbar School, further contributed to the growing unrest across the country, which culminated in several bomb explosions in Kathmandu and a number of provincial centres in June 1985 (Mikesell 1999, Burghart 1996). The shock at this violence led to a temporary abatement of opposition from teachers and political parties alike, only to be fuelled again by the popular discontent with increased food and fuel prices which resulted from the Indian trade embargo imposed in March 1989 and the growing confidence and frustration of the political parties (Hoftun 1994, Hoftun *et al* 1999). This time the movement was more coordinated and coincided with a growing sense of defeatism and internal division within the old regime, and thus ultimately led to the 'revolution', or rather the restoration of multi-party democracy, in 1990.

With such unrest and the failure of the icon of the *panchayat* regime, the NESP, education policy in the 1980s saw the government becoming increasingly caught up in the rhetoric of the international donors as it sought financial support and both internal and international legitimacy. During this period a shift in the support given by donors to Nepal can be traced, with the United Nations' agencies and the World Bank becoming increasingly significant players in the education sector, in line largely with their 'Basic Needs' focus and the increasing conviction among the donor community that education, and primary schooling in particular, could lead to a series of other development 'goods' (an issue discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3).

Two projects of particular note were introduced during this period, and can largely be considered the antecedents to the current BPEP initiative, the Education for Rural Development Project ('the Seti Project'), developed and funded by UNICEF, UNESCO and UNDP (Bennett 1979), and the Primary Education Project (PEP), supported by UNICEF and the World Bank (World Bank 1984, CERID 1989). Both were spatially bounded initiatives, confined to a limited number of districts: the former to six districts in the Far Western region of the country, and PEP in a further twenty districts scattered throughout Nepal. Such initiatives highlight the explicit intertwining of approaches to education reform in Nepal with global programmes and the interests of the international donor community, in these cases the need to utilise integrated approaches to rural development and the growing focus on the promotion of 'education for all', with a particular emphasis placed on primary schooling. Such a focus encouraged a move away from a centrist approach to school administration with the introduction of a school 'cluster' model and the use of 'resource centres' as

mechanisms to encourage more decentralised control and management of educational institutions.³⁵ Clearly such moves represent a considerable clash of interests for the government which wished both to gain international support, by engaging with the rhetoric of decentralisation, and maintain the privileges and power of the ruling group. However, this process of seeking internal and international legitimacy for the state through engagement with global development discourse and the direct linking of government actions to international initiatives continued apace as the state was subject to a further re-visioning, with the return to multi-party democracy in 1990.

Unity Amidst Diversity: Multi-party Democracy, the *Janajati* and Schooling

With the fall of the *panchayat* regime and the re-emergence of a multi-party democratic structure in 1990, the Nepali nation was again re-imagined and redefined. In particular the Constitution was re-written to define Nepal as a “multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, democratic, indivisible, sovereign, Hindu and Constitutional Monarchical Kingdom” (Hutt 1993). This shift in construction of the nation represents a further attempt by a new political regime to distance itself from its predecessor, in this case by emphasising the acceptance of a greater degree of ‘difference’ — both political and social — than was permitted during the *panchayat* period. Again, there are strong synergies between the way the Nepali nation-state is depicted by various groups — the state and those making claims for greater inclusion within it, such as ethnic rights activists — and by the dominant priorities and concerns of the international development agencies.³⁶ This is not to say that groups within Nepal hold the same views as are being promoted in more global fora, but rather that the connections with particular global initiatives are given emphasis in specific contexts to advance their interests. The UN Year of Indigenous Peoples (1993), for example, was used as a forum through which certain ethnic rights issues were raised by activist groups in Nepal in a bid to give greater weight to their claims for inclusion and to open up further potential sources of funding (see National Committee for the International Year of the World’s Indigenous Peoples 1993 for discussion of the position taken by the leading ethnic activist groups in Nepal).

³⁵ Indeed, the Seti project, which made extensive use of this approach, has been hailed by the donor community as a key example of the successful introduction of this approach, with a UNESCO PROAP report considering it an “exceptional example of how people can contribute to their own development” (Tamang & K.C.: 1995:i).

³⁶ One cannot, of course, talk of development discourse as a singular, global monolith. As the case of BPEP in Nepal shows, different donor agencies often have quite distinctive interests, which shape

The return to multi-party democracy itself was couched in terms of increasing participation and of the strengthening of civil society, and thus fits neatly with the concern throughout the 1990s of greater partnership between actors in the development process and a more participatory approach to the construction and implementation of programmes.³⁷ Consequently, since 1990 the number of bilateral donors operating in Nepal has increased. A notable addition in this period has been several of the Nordic countries (Norway, Denmark and Finland). Pfaff-Czarnecka draws attention to the linkages between the national political structure and funding interests with reference to the emergence of large numbers of NGOs, noting that:

The democratisation process, so thoroughly interwoven with minority movements, coincides with new international funding agencies that (a) strive to by-pass the state according to the demands of structural adjustment imperatives, and due to reluctance to cooperate with cumbersome bureaucracies (b) follow new ideologies, partly contrary to those promoted during the 1960s and 1970s, by pointing out the development potential of traditional forms of communal life; and (c) are under pressure to legitimate their action by showing that they have gained 'access' to the people and that people themselves participate in the project (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1997: 458).

Multiple layers of conflict are apparent, with the government seeking to mediate competing visions of the role of the state whilst striving to maintain the authoritative position of the ruling elite.³⁸ This is particularly evident in the process of negotiation which took place as the Constitution was prepared and attempts were made to appease the interests of various groups. Ethnic and linguistic rights groups, for example, found their claims for the greater recognition of diversity were widely dismissed or only partially dealt with by those preparing the final documentation. Rather than address the concerns expressed by these groups and acknowledge their claims for greater inclusion, the Constitution Recommendations Commission saw them as a source of communal tension and a potential threat to national unity and dismissed them as irrelevant (Hutt 1993: 35-6). Indeed, the Chair of the Commission noted that it was "unfortunate" to see suggestions made about such "peripheral" issues (Hutt 1993: 36). Consequently, what recognition of diversity there was in the Constitution was carefully balanced against provisions which secured the position of

their interventions (Chapter 4 discusses this further). Nonetheless, as Grillo (1997) highlights, it is possible to see common themes and trends emerging, at least in the global rhetoric.

³⁷ Indeed, as De Chene has highlighted, what has emerged in the 1990s is not "adjective-less democracy", but "*bikase*" democracy; democracy based on engagement with development processes of the international donor community (De Chene 1996).

³⁸ In addition to negotiating between different visions of the state from within Nepal, there was also a significant external focus to the constitutional amendments, with the Commission sending a

currently dominant groups. In the case of language, for instance, languages other than Nepali were given the status of 'national languages', but Nepali in the Devangari script retained a privileged position as the 'language of the nation' and the official language of government.³⁹ In recent years, competing visions of the state have found expression in debate around the issue of decentralisation. The Local Self Governance Act (2055) was the catalyst for further protests at the national level, notably by the Federation of District Development Committees, as well as more localised conflict between District and Village Development Committees and the Line Ministries of the central government.

An examination of the impact of global discourses on educational reform in the post-1990 period highlights this intertwining of local, national and global visions of the state and the inclusion of diverse groups, and highlights the tensions which exist as a result. The World Conference on Education for All in 1990 and the Declaration which stemmed from it (WCEFA 1990) reiterated the belief that a 'global consensus' on education for development policies had emerged. This position included a call for a greater focus on basic and primary levels of education and the reaffirmation of the commitment to universal primary education. The new government in Nepal signed up to the WCEFA Declaration as one of its first international agreements, signalling interests in establishing strong links with the international community and in attracting financial support for development efforts. In 1992 the Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP I) was instigated with the support of external funding agencies as the national response to the global initiative. This marked the largest donor intervention in the education sector, covering 40 districts during the first phase of the Project (1992-7) and national coverage aimed for during Phase II (1999-2004) (BPEP 1999). The initiative also represents a significant influence in monetary terms, with external support for BPEP I totalling US\$ 67.45 million and a further US\$ 106 million ear-marked by funding agencies for BPEP II⁴⁰.

The relationship between education and the dominant global vision of development became more strongly articulated during this period, with greater certainty over, for example, the links between level of education and fertility levels, farming productivity and child mortality.

representative to Britain on a study tour, to examine constitutional issues, including relations between the elected government and the monarchy (Hutt 1993: 35).

³⁹ Similarly, while cultural diversity is recognised, it is the clothing of the high caste hill people, including the *topi*, a patterned hat for men, which constitutes the 'national' dress to be worn by Members of Parliament and those entering the House.

This discourse also filtered to the national level, with the promotion of education in Nepal linked even more strongly to ideas of development and poverty alleviation. In addition, with this increasing globalisation of education initiatives came a need for a high degree of comparability between the outcomes of BPEP and the indicators used for the assessment of Education For All (EFA) at the regional and global level. Thus an increased focus on quantifiable indicators of achievement emerged, with studies commissioned which aimed to highlight changes in areas of key interest to the global donor community.⁴¹

Consequently the types of 'diversity' that were focused on and made explicit for this forum were somewhat different from in previous policies, with gender, disability, 'socially disadvantaged' groups and, particularly, poverty becoming salient indicators of difference at the policy and programme level. In addition, in the changed global political climate of the early 1990s, the multi-party democratic basis of the Nepali polity also needed to be emphasised. The 1992 Report of the National Education Commission, for example, highlights that, "After the reinstatement of democracy in the country, it has been realised on all hands that education has a key role to play in bringing about social changes, and in the reconstruction of the nation as a whole" (NEC 1992: 1). It was therefore important to provide education to women, children, orphans, the disabled and the poor "to enable them to become partners of national development" (*ibid.*: 6).

However, despite the emphasis on 'unity amidst diversity' as the defining characteristic of the nation, a considerable lack of clarity remains about how diversity is actually to be dealt with and in what image 'unity' is to be constructed. As the NEC Report notes, the new Constitution "affirms that the State will follow a policy of maintaining national unity in the midst of the cultural diversity of the country by allowing everybody to develop his language, literature, script, art and culture in healthy, happy harmony with all other religions, ethnic groups, communities and languages" (*ibid.*: 6). Tension remains, however, over whether this vision can go beyond representing diversity as the colourful, cultural differences of the many ethnic groups, their food, clothes and lifestyles, and begin to tackle the underlying inequalities of access to resources and the differential status of various social groups within the nation.

⁴⁰ BPEP I refers to the first phase of the initiative which remained largely within a project framework. The second phase, BPEP II, was referred to as a programme approach. I differentiate between the period with reference to BPEP I or II and through the use of the terms 'project' and 'programme'.

⁴¹ A number of studies were commissioned on areas prioritised in the EFA assessment exercises, including class 3 and class 5 achievement, socially and educationally disadvantaged groups, and girls participation in schooling (e.g. EDSC 1999, 1997, CERID 1997).

There is, then, a need to explore such issues further and to examine how tensions between global, national and local interests are played out in a particular context. This requires the impact of a large scale multi-donor funded initiative, such as BPEP, to be contextualised in order to highlight its position and influence in relation to the range of competing interests which impact on the everyday practice of education administration and schooling provision. Through the more ethnographically-focused discussions that follow, I wish to explore the multiple visions of the relationship between schooling, development and the Nepali state which inform education decision-making and implementation in the current context. In doing so, the role of external assistance in the promotion of educational reform will be firmly situated within the broader networks of influence and interests which operate around and within the school system. Before turning to this more situated view of external assistance, I wish now to explore how the various donors conceptualise the focus of their attention, the Nepali state, and their own role as providers of financial and technical support.

Chapter 3

Constructing Consensus: Donor Discourses of Education, Development and the State

“Nepal’s economic development is hampered by a number of conditions. The country has no access to the sea and its mountainous terrain complicates communication links and the development of an economic infrastructure. Nepal has substantial hydroelectric potential but is otherwise deficient in natural resources. Gross national product is low and the population growth rate high. Over 50 percent of the population live in poverty, and education levels and health standards are low. The economy is highly dependent on agriculture, predominantly subsistence farming. Agricultural production is influenced by weather conditions and is consequently subject to fluctuations” (Country Strategy Paper for Nepal, DANIDA: 1996).

“Even under the best of circumstances, Nepal’s development would present a formidable challenge given the many constraints it faces, including its forbidding terrain and tough climatic conditions, its landlocked position, and the diversity of its society, which is barely emerging from its feudal past. But there are other important factors. One is that implementation of development policies and programs has been uneven, with good progress at some times in some sectors, but never the sort of sustained, broad-based accomplishments needed to achieve a major reduction in poverty. Even where good policies or programs have been adopted formally, they have often been countermanded by politically motivated measures at cross purposes with stated policies. And substantial volumes of foreign assistance, while contributing significantly to many of the development achievements ... have created an environment of generally weak Government ownership. Traditional ‘top-down’ development assistance has also stifled beneficiary ownership of programs and the institutional development necessary for durable economic and social progress” (Country Assistance Strategy, World Bank 1999a: 2).

Introduction

A country constrained by its geography. A “hermit kingdom” (Ragsdale 1989) emerging from a feudal past into the modern world. A development trajectory stunted by a flawed political culture. Such images of Nepal dominate the documents of development agencies

and are used to 'set the scene', to provide the necessary background to justify intervention by external bodies. The above extracts, taken from the Country Strategy Papers of two of the leading donors to Nepal's Basic and Primary Education Programme, the World Bank and DANIDA, highlight the discursive representation of the geographical, social and political landscape which characterises many donor narratives on development intervention in Nepal. Based on a selective re-presentation of Nepal's history, such imagery serves to create Nepal as a 'developing' country, a country requiring the forms of intervention that the donors can provide. In addition, the inputs and programmes proffered by the donors are presented in such documents as neutral, apolitical interventions which will lead to the direct expansion of development 'goods' within Nepal and, in the current policy context, contribute to the elimination of poverty. Reform of the education sector is, for example, presented as a mechanism through which other development goals can be worked towards — the improvement of child health, the increase in agricultural productivity and a decline in population growth. Discourses which offer critiques of these assumptions or which propose alternative visions of development processes are given very limited consideration, with the frameworks of knowledge within which the leading agencies work given priority.¹

Given the current debates around best practice for inter-donor and donor-recipient relations — the greater focus on partnership-based, multi-donor initiatives and 'sector-wide approaches' to funding delivery — the importance of establishing a common basis for intervention and an agreed focus for action has increased. Consequently, a focus on consensus building and establishing an apparently incontrovertible basis for joint action has emerged as a key concern in recent education debates, as in other sectors. The World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 marked a key point in the defining of the basis for such a common position, with the subsequent development of programmes and new modalities for aid delivery throughout the 1990s following the trajectory established at this forum (see WCEFA 1990, King 1991, Irvine 1996, EFA Assessment 1998, DFID 1997, 1999a, 1999b, Ministry for Foreign Affairs 1997, World Bank 1995, UNICEF 1999). This move towards greater co-ordination of external interventions is particularly discernible in the Nepali context, with the immediate response to Jomtien bringing together a number of donor initiatives under one project banner, the Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP) in 1992. This strengthened attempt to build a

¹ There are areas of difference and disagreement between donors in terms of the most appropriate form that interventions should take. However, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5, those agencies able to present arguments based on particular forms of evidence and draw on experience from a range of cases are able to more forcefully support their perspective.

consensus framework for intervention among various interest groups has continued through the development of the second phase of the initiative which commenced implementation in 1999. Referred to as the Basic and Primary Education Programme or BPEP II, this phase of the initiative introduced additional donors and adopted a 'basket funding' approach as a means of coordinating external investment in core elements of the programme.²

Under the BPEP Phase 1 initiative (1992-1997), individual donors continued to support specific areas of educational reform, as had been the case in initiatives such as the Primary Education Project. UNICEF assisted textbook and curriculum development, DANIDA explored school construction and non-formal education and the World Bank contributed to the construction of buildings, for example³ (see UNDP 1994:8 for a table of donor interests). However, BPEP I did mark a distinct move away from geographically scattered initiatives which concentrated inputs on only a few districts, to a position which dealt with education reform as a country-wide concern,⁴ and avoided the "balkanisation of aid" which had characterised external involvement particularly in the 1970s and 1980s (Dixit 1996).⁵ Attempts were made to co-ordinate activities and share responsibility for interventions, with a common umbrella project name utilised and attempts made to co-operate on issues such as donor missions. The World Bank, for instance, invited other agencies to act as observers during their mission activities. This greater co-ordination and interest in promoting a unified intervention was further refined as BPEP moved into a second phase, with the introduction of new donors (NORAD, Finland, and the European Union) and a greater focus on donor agency co-ordination, a move emphasised by the reconfiguring of the 'Project' as a 'Programme'. An interest in building a more co-ordinated approach emerged as a central concern during the early stages of BPEP II, with the focus on a common framework for action emerging as a key feature of the new phase of the intervention.⁶

² The 'basket funding' model involves contributors to the Core Investment Plan placing their funds in a common bank account, with the same proportion of each donors' money being used for the various components of the programme. In the case of BPEP the external agencies involved in the CIP or 'basket' are the World Bank, DANIDA, NORAD, European Union and Finland. The basket approach is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

³ Other donors to the BPEP project were UNDP, which assisted with the preparation of the basic and primary education Master Plan, and JICA, which made contributions to school building and rehabilitation.

⁴ A distinction between 'project' and 'non-project' districts remained, with project benefits extended in a phase-wise manner. By 1997 40 of the 75 districts had been drawn into the BPEP initiative as full project districts, although textbooks and the new curriculum were introduced country-wide.

⁵ Notably, JICA only implements school construction projects in specific areas of Nepal, namely areas accessible by road. Thus their intervention is focused in particular on schools in the *terrai* and accessible hill districts (JICA 2000).

⁶ After negotiations, the Program Implementation Plan (PIP) emerged as the key framework for intervention (MOE 1999). The process surrounding this is discussed in Chapter 5.

Through this chapter I wish to explore the basis on which the intervention has been built, and highlight the assumptions and 'taken for granted' claims and linkages about development and education that lie behind the BPEP approach. I examine how the development of the BPEP initiative as a multi-donor funded programme is based on an apparent 'consensus' view of the importance of education⁷ (CERID 1999) stemming from the EFA discourse and on a particular construction of the social, political and historical context of the Nepali state. I argue that, while such a stance may allow for co-ordination of activities and agreement between the various parties to be reached, it is based on a limited picture of both the 'object' of development (the Nepali state) and the role that education could play as a solution to the perceived developmental problems of Nepal. In addition, the focus on consensus masks the often divergent views of the appropriate path and pace of change held by the various donor agencies, a point which will be explored at length in Chapter 4.

This discussion focuses specifically on two particular dimensions of the presentation of Nepal in the BPEP-related documentation, texts which form the basis of the apparent consensus around the need for external involvement. Firstly, the projected image of Nepal as a state in need of the forms of development that the agencies can provide. And, secondly, the vision of the role of schooling as a locus of positive socio-economic development. This textual exploration provides a lens through which to understand the Nepal initiative in the context of broader global trends in education and development discourse and practice. In addition, investigating the discourse of the BPEP initiative helps situate the more practice-oriented focus of the following chapters and provide a basis for examining how the expressed rhetoric surrounding new aid relations is played out in a specific context. Before turning to the specific content of the BPEP-related documentation I wish, however, to explore the significance and the use made of the particular literary genre of the development text.

Understanding the Texts of Development

As I discussed in relation to my own research experience in Chapter 1, the expectations and practices of academic and donor-oriented research work and writing can, at times, appear to conflict and offer distinctive visions of a context or series of relationships.⁸ Indeed, to

⁷ The term 'consensus' is used repeatedly in relation to the EFA initiative in general and BPEP in particular (e.g. CERID 1999, Myers 1999, Gould *et al* 1998, WCEFA 1990).

⁸ While the boundary between academic and agency-oriented work on development is somewhat blurred, with individuals often engaged in both activities, there are distinctive and readily discernible research and writing conventions associated with each approach.

understand the issues and concerns which impact on the day-to-day activities of the school and the significance the institution has for people within a given community, it is unlikely that someone pursuing academic research would turn to the programme documentation prepared for a donor-funded initiative. As has been noted in relation to the texts of development more generally, “in a textual field so laden with evasion, misrepresentation, dissimulation and just plain humbug, language often seems to be profoundly misleading or, at best, have only limited referential value” (Crush 1995: 5). Rather than perpetuating an “uncomprehending stand-off” between practitioners and academics (De Chene 1996), it is perhaps more productive to explore development writing as a unique textual form, and to examine the power relations and privileged knowledge which ensures the pre-eminence of this approach in particular contexts. Indeed, “what changes when we move from academic discourse to ‘development’ is not the library of available thoughts, but the institutional context into which both discourse and thought are inserted” (Ferguson 1994: 68).⁹

Thus, in presenting the ‘problems’ facing the education sector, the documentation of the various agencies must meet a number of requirements, of which portraying a comprehensive picture of the complex networks of interests in schooling and the challenges faced in carrying out classroom activities is *not* a priority. Rather, the production of programme documents and Master Plans which meet particular criteria and contain certain forms of ‘knowledge’ is necessary to secure support and funding from global agencies by presenting the recipient country as an “object of development” (Mitchell 1995) which would benefit from the education sector interventions that the external agencies are able to provide. Returning to Ferguson’s discussion of the involvement of external agencies in Lesotho, differences between competing presentations of knowledge can be readily distinguished. In particular, he notes:

⁹ The work of Ferguson (1994), Escobar (1995) and, to a lesser degree, the contributions to Crush’s (1995) edited volume, have been subject to extensive critique on the grounds that ‘development’ is constructed as something of a monolith in their work, with little attention given to the contested and competing visions of development as industry or as a broader process of social advancement (e.g. Grillo 1997:20-21, Crewe and Harrison 1998:16-19). Similarly, ‘the developers’ and, in the case of Ferguson’s work, ‘the state’ appear as somewhat fixed entities which act on and are reacted to by others. Such a stance again leaves limited scope for exploring competing interests within and between various agencies of both donor and recipient states and multi-lateral organisations. Thus, while the deconstruction of the ideas and practice of development offers a useful route through which to explore the texts of development, and I have engaged with aspects of this approach in this study, the thesis as a whole attempts to go beyond this position. In highlighting the multi-vocal nature of the work of agencies in practice and exploring the interface and overlap between varying interpretations and perspectives on the idea of development a more nuanced picture of relations is painted through this thesis as a whole.

For an analysis to meet the needs of 'development' institutions, it must do what academic discourse inevitably fails to do; it must make Lesotho out to be an enormously promising candidate for the only sort of intervention a 'development' agency is capable of launching: the apolitical, technical 'development' intervention (Ferguson 1994: 70).

The key *raison d'être* of the development text is thus to construct a basis for the intervention of the donor agency, to justify the need for a particular form of assistance in a specific context. In doing so, planning must appear to be based on a rational process, a process which must give the impression of having considered all significant factors which could potentially affect programme implementation (Mitchell 1995: 149). As Mitchell notes:

Development is a discourse of rational planning. To plan effectively, it must grasp the object of its planning in its entirety. It must represent on the plans it draws up every significant aspect of the reality with which it is dealing. A miscalculation or omission may cause the missing factor to disrupt the execution of the plan (Mitchell 1995: 149).

The key point here is the focus on factors considered significant for pursuing a rational planning process, with apparently irrational factors, such as party political biases, therefore discounted or selectively incorporated into the analysis.

It is at this juncture that a degree of "self deception" is required (Chatterjee 1993) in order to ensure the perpetuation of the development industry's view of itself as having a rational, detached view of the particular context and thus able to calculate the inputs required to promote positive change. In constructing development as an entity above and removed from the contexts it seeks to influence, little space remains for understanding the way in which the practices of external agencies have become embedded in the everyday experiences of recipients and the extent to which perceptions of external agencies have become tightly bound up with the very notion of what it is to be developed.

Mitchell's exploration of USAID's discursive representation of the problems and needs of Egypt clearly highlights this dimension of development texts, with the external organisation absent from the scene, regarded as a "rational consciousness standing outside the country", when in fact it plays a central role in shaping relations of power within the country (Mitchell 1995: 149). Rather, in the development texts a 'geographical image' of the Nile Valley is used to portray and explain Egypt and its problems, a move which naturalises and rationalises these perceived difficulties and renders invisible the role of external agencies in the shaping of political and social life. The focus on a naturalised, timeless image of the Nile

and its population ensures, for example, that the political issues people face are marginalised, and reduced instead to questions of natural resources and their more efficient control (*ibid.*: 146). Thus, “as a discourse of external rationality, symbolised as the consciousness that unfolds Egypt as a map, the literature of development can never describe its own place in this configuration of power” (*ibid.*: 149). The role of external influences and the particular impact of US involvement in the country is left uncharted.

A similar focus on the physical geography of the country alongside an omission of donors or other external factors from the ‘map’ of potential influences on political and social change is evident in the case of Nepal.¹⁰ Discussions of donor involvement are presented in a separate section to discussions of the Nepali context, highlighting a sense of separation between the site of intervention and the locus of potential development. The visions of Nepal presented in the country documents with which this chapter began emphasise the environmental constraints faced by the country, its mountainous terrain and weather conditions. The country is presented, for example, as an almost generic ‘landlocked country’, with little consideration of the implications of which entities it is surrounded by and the geopolitical relations in which it is embedded.¹¹ The naturalisation of this situation and the need to construct discussions of Nepal in isolation from discussion of the broader regional context¹² render specifically political factors, such as import / export restrictions and the possibility of trade embargoes being used by India to exert political pressure, practically invisible in these intervention-oriented constructions.

Where discussion of donor intervention is included, as it is in the World Bank paper cited above, the focus appears to be on how these positive initiatives have been thwarted by irrational factors such as “politically motivated measures” at odds with stated policies. The slightly more critical tone which enters the Bank text near the end of the excerpt is relatively unusual and appears to more firmly situate the external agencies in this presentation. Yet, the form of this introduction of donors into the narrative further enhances the dominant divide between the ‘rationality’ of the external discourse and approach and the problematic nature of national politics with, in this case, the government presented as “too weak” to take

¹⁰ While documents usually contain a few paragraphs on how donors are helping overcome problems, the manner in which this is presented firmly situates the external agencies as apart from and above the site of intervention, rather than also being ‘on the map’.

¹¹ Indeed, there are marked similarities between the way Nepal is constructed and the discursive construction of Lesotho as a “landlocked country” (Ferguson 1994).

¹² The structures of many development agencies, based on country focused planning, tend to work with only limited co-ordination with offices in neighbouring states.

on ownership of the programme. There is a degree of self reflection and critique here, with the frameworks for delivery of assistance highlighted as a key factor contributing to the lack of transfer of responsibility, a move which reinforces the underlying need to rationalise all possible elements that influence programme implementation in an apolitical way. The focus on the mechanism for aid delivery, as opposed to possible disjunctures in commitment or differing visions of appropriate paths of change between external agencies, recipient states and other beneficiary groups, ensures the ability to improve delivery and further facilitate change remains in the hands of the donors. The challenge is thus to deliver the services and inputs which are seen as accepted 'goods' more effectively, rather than to question how these inputs are viewed and received by the various recipients. Therefore, in the World Bank narrative a focus on moving away from more 'traditional' models of assistance can be seen, with the implicit assumption that a more modern and rational model can be found which would more comprehensively understand the recipient context and thereby allow the more effective delivery of services.¹³

The focus of attention is thus shifted away from the content of policies and plans to the need to understand the recipients of aid more comprehensively in order to deliver services to them efficiently. The implicit assumption embedded in these discourses, of which the Bank document is a clear example, is that previous approaches to development were limited by their failure to consult with the "beneficiaries" and "local communities" being targeted (Crewe and Harrison 1998: 15). Developing more effective mechanisms for promoting this understanding, such as the current range of participatory approaches, is thus the focus of much self reflection, with questions about the actual project of development itself rarely addressed. The increasing role of Social Development Advisors has been pointed to as a shift which epitomises this tendency, with their position being to "mediate" between the culture of the recipients and the world of development, "but always with the long-term objective of rational development planning" (*ibid.*, see also Rew 1997).

In the context of the current interest in sector-wide approaches and partnership-based models of development co-operation, the importance of such texts appears to be increasing, forming the basis for binding agreements between multiple donors as well as with recipient

¹³ Rew highlights the link between increasing pressure on aid resources and the need to effectively deliver services and considers the problems associated with this in terms of the limited space that is open for periods of experimentation with alternative approaches to development. He notes that the "danger is that the pressures on development aid will be turned into pressures on social development specialists for methods which give more and more control over aid supply and over the management of 'popular consultation' by government and other agencies" (Rew 1997: 102).

governments.¹⁴ The building and maintenance of an apparent consensus around the content and form of interventions therefore becomes crucial to ensuring continued co-operation between the partners and to enabling interventions to be initiated which conform to individual donor requirements as well as more globally-endorsed agendas.

Indeed, as part of the move to the second phase of BPEP in Nepal (BPEP II), an initiative entitled *Visioning BPEP Phase II* was conducted and a leaflet and video presenting this vision produced. The necessity of such materials was premised on “a well-known fact that all the stakeholders need to understand the philosophy of the program and share the common value in order to make a success of the program” (CERID 1999: 3). This was deemed particularly necessary at this stage as the initiative was moving from a ‘project’ to a ‘programme’ approach, involving greater co-ordination between multiple donor agencies and the government, and initiating a more decentralised approach to planning and implementation. Broader participation in the programme was seen as key to its success, with effective participation requiring a common understanding of what was being attempted and why. The major objective of the exercise was thus:

to allow policy makers, project managers and stakeholders to reflect on the lessons learned and to evolve fresh perspectives on BPE. The goals are to think beyond the current structure and system to identify new directions, ways and means and then to share the visions with the districts and communities that will implement BPEP II (CERID 1999: 3).

The development and dissemination of these shared visions would allow, it was hoped, more “coordinated development” of the programme and, by implication, more effective implementation with a “common ground for understanding work and responsibilities” being set (CERID 1999: 10). The assumption underlying this exercise was if officials, teachers and parents were informed about the content and structure of the programme, particularly its move towards decentralisation of education planning, then they too would join the consensus and share the common vision of its importance and thus work to ensure its success. The problem which remains is how to ensure people interpret the initiative and its inputs correctly and use them effectively to meet the programme goals; as the CERID Director noted, how to shift a “concept into culture”. The concept itself is unquestioned and unquestionable.

¹⁴ Here the recipient government is constructed more firmly as a ‘subject’ of the development process rather than an ‘object’, engaging in activities rather than simply being acted upon by external forces. But the forms in which this ‘subject’ can be presented and is able to act are very particular, remaining

The importance attributed to texts as the basis of a shared vision is, of course, potentially problematic as it overlooks the power dynamics and processes of negotiation and compromise which take place during the development of these documents. The often heated debates and discussions which took place during the World Conference on Education for All, for example, and the opposition to aspects of the Declaration (WCEFA 1990) expressed through the submission of proposed amendments by individual states and groups with similar interests is now given little consideration (King 1991). The final text is taken as the basis of a “global consensus” around which action can be initiated. Further, the specific nature of international fora such as the World Conference on Education for All and the pressures which can be brought to bear on participating countries to ensure they voice support for the ‘global’ initiative requires consideration. As Colclough notes, “there is a gap between the reality of those domestic political processes which govern the allocation of national resources, and the quite separate political process which leads governments to sign up to the advocacy of particular international development targets” (Colclough 1998: 34).

In addition, the interests and concerns of individuals and the institutional constraints that they have to negotiate and work within further complicate the picture, with individuals’ political commitments and capacity to question and offer alternative narratives of development and change incompatible with the common consensus picture presented. In an intriguing discussion of the career trajectories of development agency and NGO staff in the UK and their perceptions of development, Kaufmann highlights the shifts in rhetoric which took place between the interview stage of her research and the way narratives were reconfigured as she shared the texts with her informants (1997: 111). She noted the move from a more informal discourse to a jargon-ridden one, a shift which not only marked out the way “words and knowledge are sources of power”, but which also marked a divide between the personal, often highly political convictions of the individual and the often conflicting interests and goals of the wider institution. Development practitioners are thus themselves “bound and disciplined by constraints” (*ibid.*: 30), constraints which are overlooked when the product of consensus is prioritised over the process of negotiation and conflict, a point that is explored further in Chapter 4.

So what, then, does an exploration of the ‘imagined world’ of development writing tell us of Nepal and the basis on which a consensus-based model of intervention can be established?

largely within the depoliticised framework which continues to dominate the new development discourse of partnership and participation.

The texts of development often mask the complexity and contested nature of many issues in order to portray a particular place as requiring intervention and any proposed programme as a rational, self-evident good. As Crush has noted, “the *discourse* of development, the forms in which it makes its arguments and establishes its authority, the manner in which it constructs the world, are usually seen as self-evident and unworthy of attention” (Crush 1995: 3, emphasis in original). Through the remainder of this chapter I wish to problematise the self-evident, to examine how development intervention in Nepal is constructed and justified. In doing so, I hope to reopen for debate issues such as the promotion of ‘good governance’ and the link between education and development, which have become accepted orthodoxy and taken-for-granted development ‘goods’.¹⁵

Promoting ‘Good Governance’: The State as Development Provider

The current promotion of ‘good governance’ as a key component of development activities brings into sharp focus the particular construction of ‘the state’ as the object of intervention that has come to dominate development discourses and shaped how particular programmes are channelled. As the countless volumes of country statistics produced annually by development agencies and at international fora testify, the nation-state has emerged as the taken-for-granted object of intervention, a free-standing, functional unit, comparable with other such units (Mitchell 1995: 147). Social and economic features of the country and the possible impact of interventions are thus regarded as transferable to, or comparable with those of other states, ignoring its position in larger economic and historical contexts (*ibid.*). The lens through which the state is viewed, as a set of institutions and practices which form the foundation of administration and governance, thus leads to a largely de-contextualised framework for understanding the state. Indeed, “in the vocabulary of World Bank economists the entity of the state and its institutions remain strangely a-historical entities, a set of functional imperatives of regulation arising from society but devoid of distinct characters and different historical trajectories. In this influential train of thought the state is always the same, a universal function of governance” (Hansen & Stepputat 2002: 1). Through such a representation, the country is imagined as “an object that exists apart from the discourse that describes it” (Mitchell 1995: 148), with, in the case of the visioning of the state, governance presented as a neutral activity requiring streamlining to ensure greater efficiency. Alternative discourses of ‘stateness’, the construction and maintenance of a particular vision of the nation-state or the operations of a combative party system as a

¹⁵ Drawing on Bourdieu (1977), Crewe highlights the ‘silence of tradition’ in which development discussion takes place and calls for the uncloaking of the assumptions made by planners (1997: 59).

dimension of the political state, are given little conceptual space in the dominant development construction of 'the state'. As later chapters will demonstrate, this move limits the extent to which the processes of development intervention can be adequately understood. Examining these relationships and exploring the contested nature of discourses on the Nepali state forms a focus of later chapters of this thesis. At this juncture, however, it is important to highlight the specific elements which have become key in donor constructions of the Nepali state.

In currently dominant agency discourses of development, which demonstrate an increased focus on the promotion of 'good governance', the role of the state is presented as a predominantly administrative one, facilitating the expansion of development 'goods' to the population. As Fuller and Harriss note, the World Bank's visioning of the state in developing countries starts from a model of a Weberian legal rational state, a "notion of a benevolent Leviathan chartered to bring about growth or to eliminate poverty" (2001: 3). The state in such conceptualisations is regarded as a "neutral arbiter of public interest" (*ibid.*), implementing apolitical policies for the benefit of its citizens.¹⁶ This benign vision of the state enables a common framework to be utilised which can be regarded as broadly applicable in a range of contexts and thus lead to the implementation of similar policies, based on the "idea that societies, economies, and government bureaucracies respond in a more or less reflexive, straight forward way to policies and plans" (Ferguson 1994: 194).¹⁷

In such discussions, a focus on 'governmentality' takes precedence over any other aspects of the state. As Ferguson notes, in this conception "the state apparatus is seen as a neutral instrument for implementing plans, while the government itself tends to appear as a machine for providing social services and engineering economic growth" (Ferguson 1994: 194). The benign nature of the state is emphasised in such discourse through a focus on the common approach taken in different contexts and the common goals being worked towards, with global agendas and commitments taken as a key base of support for this position. It is noted in *The State of the World's Children 1999*, for example, that the state has 'responsibilities'

¹⁶ While I acknowledge the current interest in re-visiting the concept of the state and the various ways in which the state has been 'imagined' (Mitchell 1991, Gupta 1995, Fuller & Benëi 2001, Hansen & Stepputat 2002), the scope of this study means that these discussions and their theoretical implications are only touched upon in as far as they relate to the specifics of the Nepali case or to the donor narratives related to this.

¹⁷ The district planning model, introduced as part of BPEP II, is constructed along similar lines to programmes implemented in countries from around the globe, including India, Colombia and Brazil. See also the 1997 World Development Report's discussion of *The State in a Changing World* (World Bank 1997).

and 'duties' to provide education due to the commitments made at Jomtien and by the commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF 1999: 63, 80). Such rhetoric leads to a common framework for understanding and comparing the performance of states emerging which assumes a linear scale from 'bad' to 'good' governance,¹⁸ examining the role of the state in terms of its efficiency and ability to perform the technical tasks of policy implementation. Recent donor interests and interventions have therefore focused on the efficiency of the state as an administrative body (Crewe and Harrison 1998: 5, 54) and have considered how to improve the effective operation of state institutions. Significantly, this efficiency drive has made the state more central in donor discourse, as the locus of sector support and development-oriented 'partnerships'. Yet its role is also constrained by global policies and pressures, including, most notably, the emphasis on expanding the private sector, market liberalisation and the reduction of government involvement in economic management (MOE 1999: 1).

The state's administrative role takes particular precedence in the BPEP-related texts, presenting the Nepali state and institutions of governance as an environment receptive to the policies of the donors and having the potential to implement them successfully.¹⁹ The shift to the programme-focused approach of BPEP II further emphasised the role of the state, with particular attention paid to how to improve the efficiency of those state institutions specifically engaged in implementing education reform. Most significantly, the role of the Ministry of Education as a "technical support Ministry" (MOE 1999: 39) was stressed and a new Department of Education established with the responsibility for programme implementation (Aide Memoire 29/11/99: 4). Thus, the slow pace of qualitative reform at the school level during the BPEP I initiative (Master Plan Team 1997: 99)²⁰ is presented as a consequence of insufficient capacity at the various levels to implement change and insufficient comprehension of the aims of the initiative as opposed to any tensions or disagreements about how and by whom educational planning and programme execution should be conducted. Donor supported initiatives to strengthen capacity and streamline procedures therefore form a significant part of the BPEP II programme and are presented in

¹⁸ An intriguing twist in this rhetoric is the recent introduction of discussions of 'failed' states. 'Governance' has become another indicator comparable across different states.

¹⁹ Indeed, the distinction between donor and government policy is frequently blurred in the programme related texts, with Aide Memoires and planning documents referring to positions as being government interests and concerns. The tension between government and donor positions is explored in greater detail in Chapter 6.

²⁰ The Master Plan discusses the problems associated with funding provision during BPEP I and the resulting slow pace of implementation. In addition, the recent Grade 5 assessment of student

terms of increasing efficiency and as a rational response based on detailed analysis of the situation, such as that provided by the Institutional Analysis (Bista 2000), in contrast to the politically motivated changes to structure and personnel which characterise the existing system.

Within the BPEP-related documentation a highly selective presentation of Nepal's political and educational history is thus incorporated into the planning documentation in order to construct Nepal as a suitable site in which to implement such reforms. Indeed, the contrast between the vision of Nepal presented in texts such as the *Program Implementation Plan* (PIP) and the Country Strategy Papers and that which emerges from a broader exploration of social and political change, as presented in Chapter 2, is striking. It is not, it should be stressed, that the programme-oriented presentation is inaccurate; rather it paints a somewhat restricted picture from which key elements relating to educational change are reoriented and viewed in a depoliticised light. Crucially, issues which are reconfigured in this way, such as the existence of conflicting views about the path of 'development' appropriate to the Nepali context and the current challenges made to the political state by the CPN (Maoist) led insurgency can (as later chapters will highlight) be viewed as important aspects of the educational and political landscape and, as such, factors requiring consideration in any attempt to implement reform. In particular, these texts largely omit or severely limit exploration of intra-national tensions and conflicting visions of relations between state and education, with political and national dimensions of the state notably overlooked.

More specifically, the presentation of Nepal's history and contemporary relations between groups with interests in the schooling sector is highly partial, with the picture which emerges strongly reflecting the broader interests of donors involved in BPEP. Focus is thus directed at a largely apolitical view of the historical development of the education system, with the state, at least in the post-Rana period, presented as a neutral provider of schooling services. Even the explicitly politically-oriented interests which guided the centralisation of state control over schooling and promoted a homogenised view of the nation-state that characterised the National Education System Plan of 1971 is cast in a depoliticised light. Thus, from the BPEP viewpoint, the NESP "inadvertently discouraged local initiatives in the planning, management and financing of primary education" (MOE 1999: 5). As was discussed in Chapter 2, far from being inadvertent this limiting of local autonomy over

performance pointed to the limited impact of BPEP on student performance. Indeed, BPEP districts appear to be doing worse in some subjects than non-BPEP districts (EDSC 1999).

schooling was an explicit aim of the NESP, with greater national control over the content and management of schooling seen as a key mechanism through which to expand central state authority, promote national integration and secure the future of the *panchayat* model of government.

Such examples clearly highlight the extent to which the BPEP programme plans are based on the view of the government as a benign provider of education services, with the technical issues of the governance of education emphasised over the political dynamics of education administration and of a multi-party democracy in general. Indeed, party political influence is expressly seen as a problem, which should be minimised to ensure the successful implementation of the initiative.²¹ The World Bank Appraisal Document for BPEP II, for example, regards party politics as posing a “high risk” to successful programme implementation, noting that “political interference in teacher appointment could jeopardise the financial sustainability of the project and its quality improvement goals if the agreed policies are ignored” (World Bank 1999b: 24). This construction of the appropriate role of the recipient government therefore limits the influence that it could have on the content of the programme. The partner government is expected to be interested in providing the best possible services to the population, with the PIP providing a blueprint for what that ‘best’ should be. Any deviation from this is considered as ‘political interference’, an issue which is considered unacceptable by the external funders.²² The highly political way in which education, and schooling in particular, has been utilised by successive governments in Nepal since 1950 (as discussed in Chapter 2) is therefore effectively ignored, a move which constrains how effective the intervention can hope to be, as it ignores the broader context in which it is being implemented. The state, as Ferguson notes, “has policies, but no politics” in the texts of development (Ferguson 1994: 66); thus the education intervention comes to be viewed as a technical process rather than the politically-laden area which it has historically been in the Nepali context.

This depoliticised view of the state as the provider of education is further emphasised when one considers how difference is dealt with in the BPEP II component activities. From the

²¹ The Master Plan 1997-2002, for example, considers that party politics distorts the representative nature of bodies such as the school management committees and recommends that such bodies “STOP ALL POLITICAL APPOINTMENTS AND NOMINATIONS” (Master Plan Team 1997: 5 emphasis in original).

²² Indeed, the issue of politically-motivated transfers and appointments has been raised at most of the donor missions conducted during BPEP II, regarded as a ‘problem’ which the government should

starting point that extending 'Education for All' is both a desirable and achievable goal, given the correct inputs, BPEP II aims to extend the benefits of schooling to those who have previously been excluded. As the PIP notes:

In order to reach the unserved districts especially girls, children of remote areas and disadvantaged communities, it emphasized the need for expanding successful experiences of BPEP I into remaining districts of the country [sic] (MOE 1999: 11).

What is of particular interest is the way target groups are categorised, with, for example, the gap between the 'poor' and the 'non-poor' and between girls and boys strongly emphasised. Highlighting such issues, particularly in such a disaggregated form, serves both to link the national level project with the wider EFA agenda and to ensure the construction of a category of 'difference' simple and broad enough to allow action to be proposed.

Gender categorisation, particularly the emphasis on 'women', has become an established basis for programming in development interventions and a feature of wide-ranging claims and broad categorisations within the texts of development. Indeed, here it is possible to note the aggregation of difference not just within Nepal but globally, the production of a generic 'Third World Woman',²³ with the DANIDA strategy paper noting that "women's situation in Nepal does not differ greatly from women's situation in many other developing countries" (DANIDA 1996). The BPEP texts follow a pattern highlighted in relation to development programming more widely, with the equation of women with poverty and exclusion, presenting them as less able to take control of their lives (Robinson-Pant 2001: 6). Thus, the PIP justifies intervention on the basis that:

women form the majority of the marginalised poor and bear the brunt of poverty. There is a strong bias in favour of males in Nepalese society, though women have a higher status in the hill communities of Tibeto-Burman stock. Rural women are typically overworked and under-nourished, with limited access to resources and services. Women's involvement in the formal sector is minimal, concentrated in low skilled and poorly paying jobs (MOE 1999: 2).

Intervention packages are consequently aimed at involving women and girls in educational opportunities and combating the cultural barriers to such participation by introducing "gender sensitization" into the training programmes for teachers and administrators "so that

minimise. The April 2001 Aide Memoire, for example, 'requested the government to adhere to a policy of limiting the frequent transfers of key staff' (Aide Memoire 6/4/01: 3).

²³ Mohanty (1991) provides a detailed discussion of the 'othering' of the Third World Woman in western academic texts, a critique which also has resonance in relation to the exploration of development texts.

biased messages are not conveyed to students explicitly or implicitly” (MOE 1999: 24). Increasing the participation of girls is thus seen not just as a technical issue of providing scholarships, free textbooks and separate female toilets in school, but one of overcoming biased, culture-laden attitudes and promoting the apparently gender-neutral messages considered more rational and appropriate in the context of development.

Interestingly, the extent that ‘projects for girls’ leave unchallenged the male-dominated power bases which have such influence over the development and implementation of education policy at both the local and national level (Sibbons 1999: 190) appears, to some degree, to be receiving consideration under the BPEP framework. As part of the Technical Assistance sub-basket, DANIDA commissioned a detailed ‘Institutional Analysis’ of the education administration, in which a gender analysis is an important feature. As the report notes, women staff members are given little respect and considered ‘deficient’ in many of the skills necessary for success in administrative leadership:²⁴

Junior male officers claimed not to respect female officers to the same extent as their male colleagues. Whilst instructions from male colleagues were usually carried out, many women complained that they were met with resistance when attempting to organise and supervise the work of male subordinates. It was felt widely that women officers were unable to command the same degree of loyalty from their junior staff as were men (Bista 2000: 98-99).

The emphasis of the Analysis is on the level of efficiency of the Ministry, with the focus on gender issues strongly related both to an equity argument and to the perspective that greater inclusion of women will lead to more effective implementation of policies related to women and girls.

The policy implications of this approach highlight the extent to which such a position remains firmly within the specific paradigm of the development text, building up a detailed picture in order to promote rational, technical solutions. In this case, the analysis of gendered attitudes of Ministry staff led to the recommendation that “obstacles to [women’s] participation in staff development courses must be addressed” (Bista 2000: 12).²⁵ The emphasis remains firmly on the process of removing barriers to participation rather than questioning the activities and approach people are being encouraged to take part in. As Robinson-Pant notes in relation to gender-focused policies of development more widely,

²⁴ Only 5% of the 1016 Gazetted category officials in the Ministry of Education and Sport are female, mainly concentrated in the lower levels of the hierarchy (Bista 2000: 97).

“there is an assumption that equitable gender relations, often framed in terms of empowerment, is an undisputed good” (2001: 5). Questioning the meaning of gender relations in the particular context of employment in the education sector or participation in schooling opportunities is given no space within these development discourses. The focus remains on promoting solutions to a problem which is considered clear-cut and incontestable.²⁶

Dealing with ethnic difference raises more vexed questions about the categorisation of groups and the implications for programme implementation. The Constitution of Nepal (1990) has accepted the “multilingual, multiethnic” nature of the state and prohibits discrimination based on caste, creed, sex and religion. The state is also “committed to promote languages, literature, arts and culture of various communities and groups to foster harmonious social relations”, a position that the BPEP donors must take as a starting point for intervention (MOE 1999: 2). Consequently, inequality cannot be addressed in terms of the systematic exclusion of particular groups or, rather less insidiously, the implicit valuation of particular cultural traits and language forms over others, as the state has already been established as a benign provider of services to all. Thus poverty and special needs become the focus of and justification for intervention with ethnic groups included in initiatives to the extent to which they can be categorised within these groupings. The Social Assessment Study²⁷ (CERID 1997), identifies 24 ‘educationally disadvantaged groups’, totalling 45% of the population, which it considers to require particular attention. The PIP also draws attention to “the need for special strategies to reach out [to] boys and girls from socially deprived groups, linguistic minorities, and migrant populations” (MOE 1999: 25), a component which it is proposed should be channelled through NGOs rather than through mainstream schooling. Ethnic difference is reconfigured into an apolitical ‘disadvantage’ and, in a move which further distances potentially controversial forms of diversity from the state, assistance is farmed out to non-governmental organisations.²⁸ The inclusion of social

²⁵ Yet, of the 78 ‘major recommendations’ made in the report, this was the only one to mention the issue of gender.

²⁶ While scholarships and other incentives for girls are core components of BPEP and frequently cited by officials at all levels, the recognition of the very low representation of women in the education administration is not considered problematic by the majority of the workforce.

²⁷ This study was funded by the World Bank and was considered a pre-requisite of IDA support for BPEP II.

²⁸ The dominance of Nepali language as the medium of instruction in government schools, of a particular vision of Nepal’s ‘national’ history in textbooks, and the limited provision of resources such as teachers or books for mother-tongue instruction is therefore only given conceptual space in technicist terms. When such concerns were raised with policy makers at the central level and with teachers and DEO officials at the school level emphasis was given to the financial and technical

difference in BPEP II has to be presented in such a way as to ensure that the forms of avowedly neutral intervention that the donors can provide can be advocated and the recipient government will find such approaches acceptable.²⁹ One sees, therefore, a highly selective defining of groups, with poverty currently a visible category of aggregated difference, that fits into the broader global agendas of the various agencies and simultaneously depoliticises the inequalities within Nepali society.

In addition to the presentation of the state as a neutral provider of services to the population, the BPEP documents, in a similar way to other texts of development, seem to “presuppose a unified intentionality and internal consistency” between the different institutions and functionaries of the state (Fuller & Harriss 2001: 3). This is particularly clearly highlighted by the BPEP initiated ‘Visioning BPEP II’ project referred to earlier (CERID 1999), which emphasises the shared interests among various layers of the education administration in improving conditions and engaging in the BPEP activities, with the remaining challenge being the promotion of a shared vision of how to implement the various programme components.

Similarly, the principle of decentralisation, a central tenet of BPEP II, is premised on the belief that state institutions share a common set of interests and objectives, but that these goals can be more readily achieved if the state is made more efficient through the delegation of planning responsibilities to the sub-national levels of the administration.³⁰ The introduction of such measures is couched in terms of equity and efficiency, and presented as participatory and thus more able to direct resources towards target groups. As the PIP states, the “purpose of district planning is not to produce complicated district plans through a cumbersome planning process, but to help districts gradually build capacity to prioritise investments by targeting critical groups and addressing most pressing problems” (MOE

constraints on providing materials for diverse groups. In contrast, discussions with ethnic activists emphasised the political interests of elite groups, particularly high caste Hindu groups living in Kathmandu, in maintaining this status quo. The linkage between language dominance, cultural dominance and political influence is strongly made by a number of ethnic based pressure groups and individual activists. Such a line of concern extends as far as questioning the constitutional definition of Nepal as a Hindu Kingdom, as discussed further in Chapter 7 (see also, Gellner *et al* 1997 and Pfaff-Czarnecka 1999).

²⁹ A DFID-funded project, the Community Literacy Project Nepal (CLPN) found that an important site for promoting literacy skills in one community was the church. However, as the discussion of religion is given little conceptual space in DFID’s approach to development assistance, CLPN staff did not feel this was a suitable entry point for their project and were even reluctant to include discussion of the role of the church in their analysis of the community (CLPN 1999 and pers. com. with project staff).

³⁰ The introduction of decentralised planning during BPEP II is discussed in depth in Chapter 5.

1999: 41). This move away from a view of the state as a single entity towards a recognition of the multiple institutions and layers which make up 'the state' at the programme level is one which mirrors the broader awareness and concern with improving the efficiency of the state in the more global donor discourses. As is noted in *The State of the World's Children 1999*:

Experience in the last few years has led to a more textured understanding of the role of the State, and of the State itself. It is no longer useful to think of the State in monolithic terms as a single national authority, but to understand that the State's authority exists at all levels from the national or federal to the local, and the roles that the State will play with regard to policy, funding and provision often vary significantly from one level to another (UNICEF 1999: 63).

The focus here, however, remains on the delegation of particular roles and responsibilities in an effort to implement initiatives more efficiently. The possibility of conflicting interests between the multiple layers of the state (between District Education Office and the Ministry of Education, for example), or between different layers of government (such as the District Development Committee and national government) is only given limited acknowledgement in the development text. For example, support for the BPEP programme from a wide spectrum of groups including local communities, local authorities, NGOs and parents, is assumed, with any barriers to the effective co-operation between these parties and the DEO presented as a consequence of flaws in administration arising from the "long standing traditions of bureaucracy" (MOE 1999: 59). The possibility of exploring the relations between different institutions and of understanding how individual relationships may impact on the course of change is foreclosed by a textual form which emphasises the common and irrefutable interests and objectives of those involved in the planning and implementation processes.

It is important to stress at this juncture that this 'construction of Nepal' is not simply a process of imposition and of dominance of donor over recipient. As Crush notes, "in the case of development, it would be a mistake to view power as emanating exclusively from one space and being directed exclusively at another. Spatially, the power of development is far more diffuse, fragmented and reciprocal than this" (Crush 1995: 8). The relationship, as I have highlighted through the historical discussion in the preceding chapter, is one of dispersed power and inequality, the use of the rhetorical power of development to advance the positions and interests of particular groups within Nepal.³¹ This apparently neutral

³¹ This point is highlighted in a particularly compelling way in Manjushree Thapa's short story *Ta'Angzoum Among the Cows* (Thapa 1996). Here the discourse of poverty, the emphasising of

discourse of the lack of development in Nepal and the factors which cause its persistence also becomes the basis for differentiating between groups within the country, asserting the authority of particular groups and places over others on the basis of their position vis-à-vis 'development' (Pigg 1992), a point which will be explored in greater detail in later chapters of this thesis.

In addition, in the current context of global development aid, leading decision makers within the education administration actively buy into and promote this depoliticised, geographically-framed vision of Nepal, in order to present the country to an international audience and to secure external assistance. For example, the *Nepal Country Paper* prepared for the EFA Year 2000 reporting process presents Nepal in very similar terms to those utilised by the external agencies, with the well-worn adage that "Nepal is a landlocked country" and details of the country's topography a central focus of discussion of the "country context" (EFA Assessment Committee 1999). During a meeting to discuss a draft of this document, a rather heated debate took place over what image of Nepal the paper should present, with some officials concerned that the image presented should not be too negative, as the aim of the EFA forum was to highlight progress made. Participants in the meeting were particularly conscious of the comparisons that would be drawn between the various country papers that would be presented at the EFA meeting in Dakar, with discussion focusing on the implications for funding of presenting Nepal in particular ways (f/n: 10/12/99). Such debate highlights the strategic uses made of images of poverty and development and, thus, the power of the development text as a highly political tool.

Constructing Donors

In addition to constructing the state as a suitable recipient for intervention, the BPEP-related documentation also plays a significant role in presenting particular donors as appropriate providers of assistance to Nepal and to the education sector in particular. Donors remain largely invisible in planning documentation and, particularly, from the landscape of Nepal as constructed in these texts. Thus this self-referential aspect of the development texts is often only implicit, establishing the donor institution as the locus of rational decision-making and change and the donor as the negation of the recipient state. Power is exercised, as Mohanty notes, in "any discourse that sets up its own authorial subjects as the implicit referent, i.e. the yardstick by which to encode and represent cultural Others" (1991: 55), a point which is

Nepal's position as a "poor, developing country" where people "live in the shadows of death rather than the shadows of the Himalas", is used strategically by individuals at both the local and district level

clearly evident in relation to the particular visions of development, modernity and 'good governance' which inform the texts of development.³² It is particularly striking to note when, how and to what audience donors choose to make their presence directly visible and at what points they situate themselves firmly in the discussion of Nepal's development, and to consider the role of development discourse in relation to the construction of the donor state's identity and position vis-à-vis the recipient, other donors and its own citizens.

During and immediately following the move to BPEP Phase II and the introduction of new donors into the programme and the Core Investment Plan ('the basket'), several documents which directly situated the agencies in Nepal were produced. The DANIDA country strategy paper, for example, is used to highlight the comparative advantage that the agency, and Denmark more generally, has in the fields of assistance that they are engaging in. Thus, while Nepal as a site for intervention is presented largely in isolation from Denmark,³³ details about the forms of intervention to be engaged in by DANIDA are accompanied by direct discussions of the opportunities for Danish business, both suppliers and consultants, in Nepal and, particularly the previous experience that has been gained by the Danish resource base and Danish NGOs working in Nepal. Danish intervention is thus presented and justified on predominantly technical-rational grounds. Nepal's development needs are established as being broadly in line with the services and assistance in which DANIDA has expertise and DANIDA is presented as a donor with a particular commitment to and experience of assisting the country. The Country Paper stresses, for example, that "as one of Nepal's main donors, Denmark is in a good position to influence future policies within the primary education sector" (DANIDA 1996). Such a document thus helps justify Denmark's role in BPEP and other programmes in Nepal to a Danish audience, the Nepali authorities and to other agencies involved in these programmes.

Shortly after the initiation of BPEP II, the two new bilateral agencies to the programme (NORAD and Finland) produced documents which firmly situate their countries in the

to advance their own pursuit of opportunities and change.

³²In the context of development, the South becomes the 'other' to the North, with the way in which Southern states can be conceptualised limited by how the North wishes to view itself. Said's (1978) work on *Orientalism* has been discussed in relation to development, with parallels drawn with an analysis of "how European identities were formed in a process of what Foucault called 'normalisation' which categorised and separated off a variety of internal figures that in the development of Western modernity came to be marked out as 'Other' — criminals, the supposedly insane, sections of the urban poor and so on" (Rattansi 1997: 483). See also Crush (1995: 7-8) for a discussion of the extent to which Said's conceptualisation of Orientalism is applicable to discussions of development.

³³ However, we are told that Nepal is three times the size of Denmark in the Introduction (DANIDA 1996).

Nepali landscape. As relatively new donors to Nepal, with large-scale initiatives engaged in only since the restoration of multi-party democracy in 1990, these publications appear to be largely designed to establish the agencies' legitimacy as promoters of intervention and change in Nepal. A small booklet produced by NORAD, *The Norwegian-Nepalese Development Cooperation*, highlighted the achievements of programmes that the Norwegians have been engaged in, with particular attention paid to the methods of co-operation being utilised. A focus on partnerships which emphasises both sides of the relationship provides a strong base from which to present the agency as an appropriate source of expertise in the field of development assistance. Emphasis is placed, for example, on the extent to which "Norway aims at being a development partner characterised by trust, respect, equality and openness, both internally within its own organisation as well as in external relations", highlighting the strength of the agency's institutional commitment to this new framework. Innovation in the field of donor-recipient relations is also stressed through the attention given to the Ministry-to-Ministry cooperation which forms a part of the Technical Assistance component of BPEP II, an approach which, the booklet states, could impact on education policy "in both countries" (NORAD 2000: 6). Attention is also drawn to Norwegian commitment to Nepal, its "30 years of experience" gained in Nepal's hydropower sector, establishing NORAD's credentials as a donor capable of working within this context.³⁴

Rather more intriguing is the glossy colour booklet entitled *Finland in Nepal* (Finland 1999), produced by the Embassy of Finland and distributed with every copy of the English language daily newspaper *The Kathmandu Post* to mark Finnish Independence Day.³⁵ This document juxtaposed photographs of Finnish children and families, scientists and industrial plants with those of Nepali children carrying fodder, women at a literacy class and a foreign (Finnish?) doctor examining a Nepali patient. Such images are accompanied by text which further emphasises the relative levels of development between the two countries, with the high quality of life in Finland, including the consideration given to equal rights for women, highlighted with reference to UN rankings. The level of Finnish investment in its own education is stressed, with the fact that it ranks highest within the OECD in terms of the percentage of GNP spent on education and has a literacy rate of 100% given particular mention. In addition, UNICEF child mortality statistics are used to demonstrate that

³⁴ Norway established government-to-government assistance in 1996. Assistance to the hydropower sector commenced in 1965, support given to the private Butwal Power Company (NORAD 2000:3).

³⁵ While not a 'development text' in the usual sense, this does offer insights into the construction of Finland through its association with its developing country 'other', Nepal.

“Finland takes good care of her babies”, and the relative wealth of the population is implied through discussion of the level of mobile phone, sauna and holiday home ownership. In this pamphlet, it is Nepal which is peripheral to the landscape, being discussed only in relation to the benefits that have been bestowed on the country by Finnish organisations. This active promotion of Finland’s role as a bilateral donor and its position as the holder of the European Union Presidency in 1999 is a clear statement of the country’s wish to be taken seriously as a donor in the Nepali context.

Whether implicitly or explicitly, the texts of development play a significant role in constructing donors, establishing their credentials as the providers of services and the instigators of change within the context of the recipient country. The vision a donor state or funding agency wishes to project of itself and the relationships it wishes to form with other parties must be considered of central importance in any exploration of the texts of development.

Constructing Education as a Development ‘Good’

Through the BPEP texts a particular vision of donors and of the Nepali state is presented, with the predominantly administrative roles performed and the state’s role as a benign provider of services to the population emphasised in order to justify external intervention. But what, then, of the service provided? How is the role of education, and schooling in particular, imagined in the textual world of development?

As with the construction of the site of intervention, the Nepali state, the intervention is presented in a form which enables and justifies external involvement. The content of education activities is constructed as neutral — a benign activity, the outcomes of which will lead to positive change and the advancement of broader development goals pursued by the recipient state and the external agencies. Drawing on the breadth of research work conducted by agencies since the 1960s and the experience of programme implementation in a range of contexts, a degree of confidence and increased certainty has come to characterise the approach taken to education reform since 1990. In particular, development texts highlight the emerging consensus among the international community over the benefits of education interventions and the form that such programmes should take. However, creating and maintaining this sense of common interest and a unified framework for action requires a selective picture of the role of schooling to be painted, a view which sidelines the political

dynamics of schooling and highlights the purported impact of education on the promotion of equity, poverty alleviation and development.

A particularly striking feature of the presentation of the BPEP programme is how the impacts of the desired end benefits of the programme (increased access to and the improved quality and management of educational opportunities) are given little discursive space and are largely taken-for-granted. Specifically, the view that education *per se* is an unproblematic developmental 'good' which will have an almost inevitable, positive impact on both the individual and the wider society's advancement appears to 'go without saying' in the BPEP-related texts. References to the global Education for All (EFA) initiative underpin discussions of government and donor initiatives in the education sector and basic and primary sub-sectors in particular. Discussions of how best to implement programmes in line with this position take precedence over any debate concerning the forms of interventions or the impact the promotion of particular content and form of schooling may have. As Williams (1995) has noted in relation to narrative strategies adopted in recent World Bank reports on the links between environmental change and population, argument by "common sense" has become a basic rhetorical strategy of the development text. In the case of education, the declaration of a global 'consensus' around the need to improve access to quality primary education at Jomtien crystallised a growing sense of certainty amongst leading donor agencies over the most appropriate path through which to channel resources for education, with this position in turn presented as self-evident. The emergence of this common "framework for action" is the result of a gradual process of growing confidence in the research base upon which policies are based and a consequent sharpened focus on the forms of intervention considered to be producing the desired results (King 1991: 3).³⁶ Indeed, in the case of leading agencies such as the World Bank, the sheer volume of the material produced affords them a degree of authority that it is difficult for other bodies of research to challenge. (See also Chapter 4.)

The return to a version of Universal Primary Education (UPE),³⁷ albeit with a greater focus on quality and equity of provision (King 1991: 220), was accompanied by a sense of greater urgency and an almost campaign-like approach to the promotion of schooling. Certainly, the

³⁶ Previous formulations of the relationship between primary schooling and broad ranging development 'goods' were somewhat more circumspect with, for example, the World Bank's (1980) Education Sector Policy Paper emphasising possible positive impacts of education on health, but not making the same degree of strong correlation as is evident in later documents.

³⁷ It is striking to note the similarities between the BPEP initiative and the plans which emerged from the discussion of UPE at the Karachi Conference of 1961 (Wood 1965, UNESCO 1961).

parallels with the mobilisation of resources to promote 'Health For All' in the 1980s are clear and the World Conference and subsequent promotion of EFA have taken on something of the form of a campaign, a rallying call for action. The precise course of action of the campaign was, at the time of its inception, not concisely defined to the same extent as the prescription of 'goods' was in the case of 'Health For All'.³⁸ However, areas of particular concern were highlighted and possible 'packages' of combinations of inputs proposed (e.g. Lockheed and Verspoor (1991: 175-6) propose a \$4-5 per student package of interventions)³⁹, with particular attention paid by the World Bank to the broad issues of quality, access and school building (King 1991: 225).

It should be stressed that the approach adopted at Jomtien was not one of 'one policy fits all': indeed, there was explicit recognition of the complex range of issues which required discussion in order to devise the best possible package for improving participation in schooling in any national context. As the then World Bank President noted at the Jomtien Conference:

The educational needs of developing countries are complex. They cannot be met by an unplanned, helter-skelter assault on vaguely perceived problems. Needs must be meticulously identified, and priorities carefully assigned by common agreement among all those concerned, both nationally and internationally (Conable 1990: 8, cited in King 1991: 226).

Yet a degree of generalisability remains within the approach taken by the Bank and other leading agencies, a position made possible, as was noted earlier, by the selective incorporation of the specific country context in the construction of the recipient state. Such visions allow for the categorisation of countries in terms of their perceived level of development or the particular constraints they face, with the most appropriate education packages for the "low income" or "lower-middle income" state subsequently being drawn on in preparing the country programme (e.g. Lockheed & Verspoor 1991: 225).

Most crucially, the texts produced at Jomtien focus on how to implement interventions: issues of whether these were appropriate or what the likely outcome of programmes may be were considered resolved. While the content of specific country packages was up for

³⁸ The Health for All campaign arose as a result of the International Conference on Primary Health Care held in 1978 and takes its priority areas of action from the Declaration of Alma Ata (WHO 1978). Eight areas of action are emphasised, including vaccination, the provision of essential drugs, family planning and improved maternal health and disease prevention.

discussion, the level of urgency apparent in the time-bounded, target-driven 'EFA by 2000' initiative is based firmly on a certainty over the correlation, even causal linkage, between education, particularly primary schooling, and a host of desired development outcomes. As the World Declaration on Education for All notes, "Education can help ensure a safer, healthier, more prosperous and environmentally sound world, while simultaneously contributing to social, economic, and cultural progress, tolerance, and international cooperation" (WCEFA 1990: 2).

The use of the EFA initiative as a framework for national level activities as well as justification for their initiation is clearly highlighted in the documentation produced both directly for BPEP, such as the Programme Implementation Plan and donor-specific plans and agreements, and in material produced by the Ministry of Education in relation to the education sector more broadly. The EFA Year 2000 Assessment country report clearly highlights the linkages between government programming and the global initiative, stating that:

In 1992, The Nepal National Education Commission for UNESCO prepared a comprehensive National Plan of Action (NPA) on Education for All for 1992-2000 which was prepared in the spirit of the workplans prepared in the first Regional Planning Workshop in Jomtien (October 1991). It attempted to estimate the magnitude of the educational development that was required for achieving EFA goals by 2000. However, the Eighth Plan (1992-1997) developed a more practicable set of targets based on the resource capabilities and on the experience of the last National Development Plan and its programmes. The NPA targets were later revised and incorporated into the ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) based on the experiences and the outcomes of the Eighth Plan (EFA Assessment Committee 1999: 8).⁴⁰

While the specific numerical levels of the targets are reconsidered at the national level, the focus of the targets and the specific content of the national programme remain firmly in line with that of the international forum. In addition, the global nature of the initiative also appears to be sufficient justification for its adoption at the national level, with the benefits of the programme broadly accepted and discussion of potential concerns or problems with the initiative limited to the cataloguing of possible barriers to successful implementation.

³⁹ This document was prepared in draft form for the Jomtien conference and formed the basis for many of the key discussions held there.

⁴⁰ Such parallels and linkages were also drawn in key BPEP-related texts (MOE 1999: 3, Master Plan Team 1997, MOE 1997).

With programmes presented as technical interventions based on a rational consideration of the available evidence and the result of a considered planning process, the potential for questioning the content of programmes is restricted. Rather, flaws in the implementation process, and particularly the culture of the educational administration, are pinpointed as the weak links in the initiative. Project success or failure is thus constructed as an issue external to the programme planning itself, with problems and concerns thus reflected outwards to responses to the initiative, rather than considered reflexively in relation to the programme content and its underlying assumptions. While the qualitative impact of the BPEP programme on school and classroom practice has been questioned (EDSC 1999, Khadka & Thapa 1998, NPC 1996: 41, 38),⁴¹ there has been little reconsideration or critical evaluation of the approach taken by the Project. Indeed, the Mid-Term Review Team explicitly note that “the question which needs to be addressed clearly is not whether BPEP should be continued, but how program implementation can be sustained and intensified” (Mid-Term Review Team 1996). The focus of the initiative appears to be a taken-for-granted good, with improved access for schooling seen as both a positive change in and of itself and a catalyst for the improvements in a number of other areas indicative of development.

Indeed, in much of the donor documentation, the relationships between education and other indicators of development, such as health indicators and agricultural productivity are so widely accepted that there does not appear to be any need to cite the original pieces of research from which the findings stem. For example, a World Bank Project Appraisal Document focusing on BPEP makes a number of claims about the role of education, such as that “the expansion and improvement of primary schooling is one of the most effective options for raising levels of economic and social development” (1999b: 11) and that “several studies conducted since the 1970s have demonstrated the positive impact of primary schooling on farmers’ productivity in Nepal” (*ibid.*: 18), although details of the research findings, or even the authors of the studies are not given.⁴² Such axiomatic relationships between education and other widely-articulated markers of improved development are also evident in the DANIDA country strategy document, which notes that:

⁴¹ The results of a National Assessment of Grade 5 Students (EDSC 1999) indicated that performance of students in non-BPEP districts was ‘significantly higher’ than in BPEP districts in all curriculum areas except mathematics. While the methodology employed in this study was not geared specifically at exploring the impact of BPEP, it does raise questions about the actual impact of the extensive investment made in the programme. These concerns were also raised by the Joint Review Mission in November 1999, with the field group concluding that there were no tangible improvements in the process of teaching / learning at the school level in the BPEP districts (Aide Memoire 29/11/99).

⁴² In the case of the agricultural studies, this is a reference to Jamison and Moock’s research on levels of schooling and agricultural production conducted in West Nepal (1984).

Education, especially of girls, is an important element in the reduction of poverty and a fundamental prerequisite for the more active involvement of weaker groups in economic and social development and in the democratic decision-making process. Education must also be viewed as an integral part of the accepted need for broader access to population policy, where the opportunities of men and women to address the issues of family planning, child care and health care generally will be enhanced (DANIDA 1996).

The case for the school being a “vital change agent” (UNICEF 1999: 68), a catalyst for improved development now appears to be sufficiently robust as to require little further elucidation. Indeed, there now seems to be little consideration of what form education should take, with the expansion of opportunities regarded as in and of itself a positive and necessary move. There is a clear view in the BPEP texts that attending class will produce change, that certain developments, such as increased agricultural productivity, will accrue as “positive, semi-automatic consequences of being in school” (King 1988: 490).

Recognition of the need to explore the content of schooling is limited and often given little prominence in the texts; indeed, in the Bank’s Project Appraisal document the only discussion which touches on this issue is consigned to an annexe. In this case the Harvard University research cited suggests that “while the impact of schooling on the demographic transition and health practices may come partly from the more assertive, reflective and independent persona resulting from the sheer experience of schooling, changes are also resulting directly from the literacy skills and information acquired in schools” (World Bank 1999b: 36-37). While this example does acknowledge the need to examine the content of schooling, it remains within a broadly technicist vision of schooling as a neutral activity for the promotion of skills for development, with the processes of classroom interactions remaining unexplored. The assumption remains that, as the vision of education as a development good is shared by individuals at all levels of the education system, a straightforward input-output model of the promotion of development messages will operate.

This predominantly technical focus on the transmission of ideas through the classroom is also evident in the PIP discussion of the curriculum component of BPEP, where the school is presented as a mechanism for the effective delivery of development-oriented skills. The discussion within the Plan focuses on the technical processes of delivering the curriculum, including the production of textbooks, the establishment of clear minimum learning levels as

indicators of achievement and guidelines for the periodic revision of curriculum content.⁴³ This selective visioning of the role of schooling is particularly clearly highlighted in the PIP discussion of the introduction of materials in languages other than Nepali. Such changes are presented as necessary to “raise the learning achievement in grades 1-3”, focusing in particular on the need to improve the efficiency and equity of schooling. The highly contentious and politically divisive nature of the language question is reduced to the neutral statement that a “language policy is yet to be worked out which will guide the preparation of materials” (MOE 1999: 32, see also Chapter 7). Here, again, the vision of modernity and development and the particular construction of the Nepali state are left unquestioned, with the emphasis in the text firmly on how to implement programmes most effectively rather than on their content and consequences.

Despite the striking convergence of donor policies over the last decade in regard to the content and form of intervention in the education sector, it would not be accurate to present a picture of all agencies following the same path. There are differences in priority and emphasis and some areas of intervention are considered more controversial than others. This divide is particularly clearly highlighted in the BPEP model of intervention, which explicitly differentiates between a core investment plan (referred to as ‘the basket’) and a ‘sub-basket’ of technical assistance inputs and initiatives which are considered to require further piloting. Significantly, the main basket contains components that all the main donors, including the World Bank, are prepared to provide support for, whereas the ‘sub-basket’ is actually a collection of separate projects funded by individual donors. The fact that the Bank does not offer support through this mechanism indicates, perhaps, that these components are not regarded as having such strongly established benefits or as clear-cut returns on investment as those placed in the core programme.⁴⁴ In addition, the fact that no strong consensus position has emerged around the best modality for teacher training delivery, combined with the strong political dimension to discussions of this issue in the Nepal context, means that this area has been fragmented and dispersed among a number of different interventions and external agencies, each with its own framework for action.

Regardless of the highly emotive nature of these debates both within Nepal and between aid agencies, the discussion in the development texts remains firmly within the over-arching, technically-focused vision of schooling which ensures that some form of intervention is

⁴³ While the PIP notes the government has requested no review be made of the curriculum for three years, a foreign advisor to the project drew on European models to highlight the need for decade-wise curriculum reform, demonstrating a clear procedure-driven approach to the task (f/n: 6/12/00).

possible, with each initiative presented in terms of its technical merits and the quantifiable improvements it will demonstrate. Thus, despite the significant differences between donors over the most appropriate form of training and the politically-charged nature of discussions of this topic among the Nepali polity, the BPEP documents present the proposed activities as a matter of efficiency, how best to promote the utilisation of materials. No discussion is given to the controversy surrounding greater regulation of teacher certification, with the modalities for promoting training and accreditation rather than its intrinsic advantages and political implications forming the source of debate.

This is not to imply that there is no critical awareness of practices of schooling or of the paradoxes inherent in education for development discourse and practice. Clearly there has been significant debate within the academic community and many of the individuals operating within the sphere of development recognise the problematic and contested nature of the education - development relationship. As King notes, many agency policy prescriptions are highly contentious and have “angered” individual academics and policy makers, particularly in the South (1991: ix-x). An extensive body of critical work does exist which explores relationships between schooling and particular aspects of development and challenges the causal linkages which are frequently assumed and guide specific interventions.⁴⁵ For example, the underlying assumption that education *per se* leads to greater equality of opportunity fails to acknowledge the role that schooling in particular continues to play in sustaining and even reinforcing social difference and in securing advantages for particular groups. Recognition of the *relational* nature of schooling and the cultural construction of the “educated person” (Levinson *et al* 1996) is limited in a vision which takes as its starting point that equality of opportunity can be achieved through the provision of ‘education for all’.⁴⁶ The question of what education is to be provided for what form of development is no longer deemed relevant in a context where time-bounded, action-focused programmes have to be produced.

⁴⁴ This could also be considered a consequence of the Bank providing loans as opposed to grants to the programme.

⁴⁵ For example, Jeffery & Basu (1996) discuss the weak empirical base for causal linkages between schooling and fertility levels, Heward (1999) questions the apparently clear-cut link between female empowerment and schooling.

⁴⁶ Indeed, the 1998 Nepal Human Development Report distinguished 5 different educational levels which arise as a result of increasingly market-oriented nature of schooling: “the expatriate model for the affluent, the private model for the less affluent, the public model for the middle class, out of school model for the poor, and no model for the poorest” (NESAC 1998: 87-88).

Such debates clearly are known to, and often actively engaged in, by individuals working within the agency context, as Kaufmann's (1997) research demonstrates in relation to critiques of development more widely. Thus the presentation of arguments in a particular technical framework cannot be considered simply the result of "staggeringly bad scholarship" (Ferguson 1994:27), but as a consequence of the particular requirements of this genre of writing. More academically-oriented critiques are rarely presented in forms which make them applicable or relevant to those required to develop interventions and administer loans and grants. Consequently, despite a long history of discussion and critique of the basis on which interventions are justified, these have had very limited impact on the course of donor policies and activities. As Crush rather bluntly notes, "the accuracy or plausibility of the argument to those who do not have to believe in it is irrelevant to those who do" (Crush 1995: 17). The particular construction of the benefits of schooling as a development 'good' and the role of the state as its primary provider that emerges in the BPEP documentation cannot be seen in isolation from the broader context of the interests of, and the pressures faced by, the specific development agencies.⁴⁷

A Paper Consensus? Understanding Texts and Practice

In the current context of development assistance, with the increasing interest in partnership-based frameworks for aid delivery, the development text has increased in importance. It provides the background and justification for the form and site of an intervention and, crucially, forms the basis for binding agreements between multiple donors and the recipient government. A specific genre of writing has emerged which presents and uses material in a form which fulfils the needs of donor agencies, providing clear rational grounds for the provision of assistance by the selective representation of the site and content of the programme of reform. Such a vision must retain a strong sense of the neutrality of the development enterprise and the benign, apolitical role played by the external agencies in order to enable action to be taken. As Ferguson asserts, "representations which present the state in such a way as to bring into question its role as a neutral tool of enlightened policy must force upon the 'development' agencies a political stance they are ill-equipped to take on, and for this reason must fall by the wayside" (Ferguson 1994: 72). Analysis of the problems faced and the solutions offered must, therefore, be presented as based on research which encompasses 'all relevant factors' and must be seen as offering neutral and incontestable benefits to the recipient state.

⁴⁷ The World Bank in particular faces criticism from a range of quarters, yet, within its own paradigm, the research work conducted and the texts produced constitute the "state of the art" (King 1991: xi).

The above discussion highlights the particularity of the development text and the forms of knowledge which are prioritised in order to enable an apparent consensus to be built around the need for action, and brings into sharp relief how ‘donor-friendly’ issues are brought centre stage and more controversial or politically-charged issues sidelined in order to allow policy and programme development. Such a focus, however, leaves little space to explore how “development discourse and practice have been received, internalised and/or resisted on the ground” (Crush 1995: 22).

Clearly, a consensus on paper does not necessarily and straightforwardly lead to the effective implementation of an initiative in practice. As Ferguson notes in relation to the Thaba-Tseka Project in Lesotho, despite apparent consensus and agreement in the texts of the project, the implementation of the initiative was not a simple process of the project coming in and acting on an ‘object’ or area, a one-way promotion of development ‘goods’. Rather, the project itself was “acted on; grabbed and pulled and twisted every which way by forces it did not understand or have the means to deal with” and “found itself in the position not of a craftsmen approaching his raw materials, but more like that of a bread crumb thrown into an ants’ nest” (Ferguson 1994: 225). Issues which are necessarily omitted from the texts of development in order to enable action to be taken may well have a crucial impact on the actual practice of programme implementation.

In the BPEP initiative in Nepal, the emergence of an apparent consensus around the programme aims and framework for action serves as justification for the intervention. However, the existence of conflicting views and interests about the role of education, views which are given no conceptual space in the guiding documentation, have had a crucial impact on how the programme has been received in practice. It is this disjuncture, between the apolitical development texts and the highly political position of the school that I seek to explore through a study of the BPEP initiative and the broader context of schooling in Nepal. I turn, in Chapter 4, to focus in more detail on the issue of partnership, highlighting the fragility of the ‘paper consensus’ upon which the BPEP initiative is based and the complex networks of relations which impact on its implementation.

Chapter 4

All the Eggs in One Basket? Exploring the BPEP Partnership

“Adoption of a ‘basket’ approach to program funding by the donors whereby each donor would contribute funds towards the total list of incremental activities would require a similar approach by the Government. In this approach, each item of expenditure would be reimbursed by the donor group as a whole. The aim is to employ a unified financing approach (a basket) to channel donor support to an agreed core investment program within the subsector basic and primary education program. A single set of monitoring, reporting, financial tracking instruments and procurement procedures would be used by all donors to reduce a potentially major burden on HMG” (MOE 1999: 51-2).

“The Ministry is essentially a donor-driven system. One way or another there is a lot of donor influence in terms of policy development and implementation. For example, donors can arrange to have direct meetings with the National Planning Commission and the Ministry of Finance and then come to the Education Ministry with decisions already made. The donors then have the upper hand as they have already influenced the NPC and other Ministries, so there is very little the Ministry of Education can do to change arrangements already made. Donors are then able to say what the important areas are and the MOE has to follow this advice from the donors” (Interview with BPEP official, f/n: 4/12/00).

Introduction

As the preceding chapter noted, the emergence of a global consensus around the Education For All initiative spawned country-wise programmes aimed at meeting its targets and objectives, with the Basic and Primary Education Project emerging as Nepal’s response to the call for educational reform. The Jomtien Conference also focused considerable attention on the form of delivery of development assistance, with the consensus around the content of programmes allowing for more coordinated, ‘partnership’-based approaches to funding and implementation being advocated. Indeed, it was stressed that “new and revitalised partnerships at all levels will be necessary” if the goals and aims of EFA are to be achieved (WCEFA 1990: 161). Through the implementation of the first phase of BPEP a move towards greater coordination had been attempted, with external funders operating under the

same project banner¹ and cooperating more closely in monitoring and implementation by, for example, inviting observation at evaluation missions. As the initiative moved into a second phase and new donors were introduced, the focus on a partnership-based model of operation was further advanced, in line with the more global interest in promoting Sector-Wide Approaches to aid delivery. Such a model is premised on the idea that external agencies offer support to national programmes rather than introduce their own projects, a position made possible because of the perceived global consensus around priority areas for educational reform. Such a shift is also regarded as a mechanism for increasing national ownership of the initiative, rendering external agencies less visible in decision-making and implementation. Indeed, as has been noted in relation to Danish development assistance:

This means in principle that in the future there will not be a 'DANIDA Sector Programme', but instead DANIDA will support a national sector framework and specific elements of this framework. DANIDA will consequently not perform its own projects or programmes in developing countries but support national activities (Madsen 1996, cited in King 1998: 86).

As the introductory extract highlights, despite the greater equality of influence envisaged in the rhetoric of partnership, co-operation and consensus-building which permeates discussions about BPEP II, a dualistic relationship remains at the centre of the framework. Donor-recipient roles are still embedded in the way the connection between organisations is conceptualised and in the interactions between individuals in the system. While greater equality between the funding agencies and the recipient government is stressed in the broader policy rhetoric, in the context of programme implementation interests appear somewhat more complex and contested. The ability to 'set the agenda', the starting point and boundaries of discussions related to the initiative, remains largely in the hands of the donors.

Through this chapter I wish to move away from an examination of policy as pronouncement and the rhetoric of consensus and partnership to a focus more explicitly on policy in practice, the way day-to-day relationships in Kathmandu impact on the course taken by BPEP. In doing so, I explore the inequalities masked by the emphasis on promoting partnership and highlight the way organisations assert their influence in the arena of education reform in Nepal. In particular I consider how differentials in power are created and sustained through the everyday practices of agenda setting, co-ordinating working practices and the defining of

¹ However, each agency still worked on its 'own' component parts of the initiative and conducted separate monitoring and evaluation exercises.

certain institutions as legitimate sources of 'knowledge' and 'expertise' in relation to both donor-government and donor-donor relations. Further, intra-organisational relationships are problematised and the contradictions between the stated consensus approach and the complexity of relations and interests highlighted. Through such an exploration it will become apparent that, far from the various partners 'putting all their eggs in the one basket', competing visions of the appropriate course of the initiative continue to emerge as individuals and organisations seek to ensure their particular interests are met. Finally, I draw attention to the pressures which are brought to bear on organisations to maintain at least the façade of partnership and unity of interest.

The BPEP Basket Funding Model

The shift to the second phase of the BPEP initiative marked a significant change in the management of external assistance, with attempts made to more closely coordinate the funding mechanisms and programme activities of the multiple donors. In line with the donors' expressed interest in establishing 'sector-wide approaches' to aid delivery², a sub-sector approach to the development and delivery of BPEP II was adopted. Under this system, donor assistance falls into three main categories, 'basket' support, 'sub-basket' support and 'non-basket' support. The core 'basket' is widely regarded as the crucial aspect of the initiative³, the area where the largest proportion of funding is directed and where donor coordination is most crucial. The sub-basket provides technical assistance components, with donors able to channel their funds to specific activities and request separate accounting statements, in effect maintaining their own project domains under the umbrella of a broader framework. The term 'non-basket' is used to refer to other donor interventions in the sub-sector which do not fit into the time-scale and overall framework of the initiative, such as JICA's time-bounded, annually-developed construction projects.

The activities of the basket are laid out in the *Program Implementation Plan* (PIP), which defines the various programme components and establishes the frameworks and institutional structures in which implementation is to take place (MOE 1999). All agencies involved in the core investment plan contribute the same proportion of funds to each activity, ensuring shared responsibility for all activities. In addition, joint accounting, monitoring and

² As expressed, for example, in Gould *et al* (1998), DFID (1999b), Smith (1999), Carm (1999), Horizon 2000 (1996, 1997), Maslak (2001), Klees (2001).

³ During a discussion at the Ministry of Finance, the official explained the BPEP II funding structure by drawing three circles, one inside the other, to symbolise the layers of funding. He then noted that 'only the core is important', with the rest seen as covering peripheral, small projects (f/n: 5/10/99).

procurement procedures were devised to provide “a transparent common approach to operational procedures” (*ibid.*:74). Mechanisms to coordinate day-to-day contact between the donors and the government have also been developed, with one donor designated as the ‘lead agency’ for a period of one year, a position which rotates through the various agencies.⁴ The lead agency should act as the channel for all communication between the donors and the government and is required to provide leadership during the joint monitoring and planning missions held twice-yearly.

In practice, however, the ‘partnership’ is not based on as equal a relationship between the parties as this model envisages. Clear differentials in the relative strength of donor voices can be highlighted, as can constraints on the ability of the government to have its interests or concerns heard. Indeed, despite the designation of a lead agency, donors continued to attempt to influence events through established contacts in both the Ministry and Department of Education and other government departments, notably the Ministry of Finance and the National Planning Commission, as the official quoted in the introduction to this chapter noted. Thus, as has been seen in relation to sector approaches more generally, the government is “confronted with a cohort of partners, ostensibly singing the same song, but often using different scores” (Smith 1999: 2). It is to the complexity of these relationships in practice that I now wish to turn, through an examination of the conflicting views which emerged around the expressed agenda of the BPEP initiative, the construction of new frameworks and institutions for the implementation of BPEP and the distinct, but related, issue of privileged sources of knowledge for the development of Nepal’s education sector.

Formulating the Basis for Basket Funding

The need to ensure the co-ordination of activities and the agreement of all donors involved in BPEP II, particularly those contributing to the Core Investment Plan (CIP), meant considerable effort was made prior to commencement of the initiative to establish clearly the content and scope of the programme and the role of the various parties. Details of the disbursement of funds, the areas that agencies were prepared to offer support for and the structures they were able to work within had, in theory at least, to be established in advance of the programme start date. Thus the relations among donors were of equal significance to the negotiations between the government and the individual donors. Certain donors were able to influence the content and pace of government negotiations with individual donors.

⁴ DANIDA provided the lead in 1999-2000, NORAD in 2000-01 and the Bank took over the role in 2001.

Concern arose, for example, during the IDA Pre-Appraisal Mission in April and May 1998 about the proportional funding each donor was prepared to contribute to physical facility development — i.e. the renovating of District Education Offices, classrooms and resource centres — as the EU indicated it could contribute no more than 5% of its grant to such activities, compared to the 25% made available by the other CIP funders. NORAD, DANIDA and IDA therefore indicated to the EU and the government at the mission that they were not prepared to finance a disproportionate amount of these components.⁵

The consensus-based vision of relationships that underpins the BPEP programme — a united donor group working with and for the recipient government agency — thus conceals the diversity of opinions, interests and working styles between the various agencies involved. The rhetoric of an “official consensus”, as one consultant informed me, hides the extent to which each donor is “trying to get its own agenda through” (f/n: 8/4/01). At a rhetorical level it is possible to trace greater convergence between the leading donors’ policies, with an apparent consensus around a poverty-focused agenda and a partnership-focused basis for aid provision emerging. But within the sphere of a particular programme’s implementation the clear differences in interpretation of this broad agenda become apparent. For example, in order to receive funding for a particular programme the agencies have a variety of different procedures and formats that have to be complied with and, crucially, wider organisational goals and priority areas that need to be addressed. Despite the interest in greater partnership and collaboration with the recipient government, pressures from within the donor organisation place considerable constraints on how and what the donor agency at the country level can do. The format that such criteria take are generally defined in agency headquarters and have to meet the same requirements as programmes implemented in other sectors and countries. This is particularly clearly shown in the World Bank funding agreement document, although other donors also have forms and structured formats which need to be completed to enable funds to be released.

The *Project Appraisal Document* (World Bank 1999b) sets out in detail the proposed initiative and the Bank’s involvement, including issues such as the content of the proposed funding, the criteria which need to be met to enable funds to be dispersed, “indications of borrower commitment and ownership”, the “value added” of Bank support to the project, and the “performance triggers” which would allow consideration of subsequent loan requests.

⁵ More forcefully, the post-Mission letter sent by the Bank to the Secretary at the Ministry of Education stressed the importance of the issue and ‘proposed’ that the government resolve this issue

This agreement, however, represents only part of the process, with various criteria expected to be met by the government before Bank support can commence. For example, a Master Plan for the BPE sub-sector and a detailed *Program Implementation Plan* (PIP) (MOE 1999) had to be prepared to Bank specifications. The Department of Education structures had to be established and endorsed by the Ministry of General Administration. The need for documentation to meet Bank criteria led to the PIP being prepared after a Sub-Sector Development Plan (SSDP) (MOE 1997), also setting out the course of the proposed initiative, had been prepared with DANIDA assistance. The component plans of the DANIDA document⁶ had been discussed with BPEP unit chiefs and government officials and were also examined by donors in May and June 1997, with requested revisions then being made to the SSDP document. However, in the process of developing the terms of the World Bank's agreement with the government it emerged that the SSDP did not meet the necessary Bank criteria. Hence the PIP was prepared, although notably by the same Nepali consultants who had been employed to produce the Sub-Sector Development Plan.

Significantly, both documents were initially given similar status, with the May 1999 Aide Memoire stating that the "main programme documentation" included the Sub-Sector Development Plan and the PIP, with the foundation for both being the Master Plan 1997-2002.⁷ By the November Mission, however, there was a significant shift in emphasis, with the PIP, its annexed Policy Framework and the Profile of the DOE described as the "basic guiding documents". The Bank claimed that it was easier for other donors to be flexible than it is for the tightly-defined Bank criteria to change, a claim which may well have some degree of validity, as the multi-lateral donors — EU and World Bank — have particularly large and cumbersome bureaucratic structures.⁸ Notably, DANIDA and Finland were able to revise their documents quickly and, in the latter case, have an additional document drafted,

with the EU "prior to inviting the donors to proceed with appraisal" (World Bank 1998).

⁶ These documents are still seen by many of those working in the Basic and Primary Education Development Unit (BPE/DU) or DOE as documents related to the specific donors.

⁷ The Master Plan was prepared by a team of Nepali academics and consultants, with financial support provided by DANIDA. The preface to the Plan gives special mention to DANIDA advisors for financial, moral and logistical support. In addition, thanks are extended by the Team Leader to "the management of Basic and Primary Education Project and its generous donors for giving our team this wonderful opportunity to contribute to the educational planning exercise of national significance" (Master Plan Team 1997).

⁸ The form of the Bank's funding agreement, a loan for specific areas of education reform to be disbursed over a fixed 3 year period, commits both parties to the agreement to pursue the stated activities over the lifetime of the loan. This need to ensure agreement means that there is very little risk taking or innovation in the choice of key components, with more innovative or 'risky' areas not seen as suitable for core funding. Indeed, risk assessment forms a significant part of the appraisal process (World Bank 1999b). The PIP is dominated by components and operating mechanisms considered to have been tested and to have had proven success in other contexts.

and funding was secured by September 1997 and early 1998 respectively (Takala 1998: 2). In contrast, the EU and World Bank considered the available documentation suitable only for pre-appraisal, with further missions conducted in January and May 1998 at which a considerable number of changes and additions were made to existing plans. Observing this, Takala notes that:

The program is in a situation where the group of actual and potential donors are divided in their approach: some are prepared to leave more of the revision of policies and plans to be done during implementation, while others demand successive rounds of discussion — conditionalities — further planning before making their decisions on funding (*ibid.*: 3).

This has led to the Bank in particular gaining a reputation among government officers and other donors of being “bossy” and “pushy”. This was frequently contrasted to the DANIDA approach, which was considered by several officials who had worked within the old project office and its (brief) successor the Basic and Primary Education Development Unit as more “people-friendly”.⁹

In addition to individual donor agencies negotiating agreements with the Nepali government, working within a multi-donor framework meant that agreements also had to be reached, and maintained, with other ‘basket’ members. As negotiations and the signing of Memoranda of Understanding were conducted separately, this led to potentially different terms being agreed by the various parties. At one meeting, for example, representatives of a bilateral donor raised concern about the lack of congruence between the agreements that the EU and World Bank had made, independently, with the government. This uncertainty led NORAD to delay signing their agreement, as their lawyers first had to consider the status of the various documents (f/n: 30/9/99). The different pace at which the donors operated during the negotiating period also led to difficulties for those who had already agreed funding. The lack of agreement over common planning, monitoring and financial management arrangements prior to the Finnish document being agreed complicated the initial administration of Finnish support. While agencies such as the Bank and DANIDA could continue operating within old mechanisms until the new frameworks were finalised, new donors faced difficulties as they did not already have implementation practices in place (Takala 1998: 4).

⁹ There was marked evidence of the positioning of government officials in one donor camp or another, with the DANIDA / World Bank split particularly significant. This was highlighted in discussions related to the disbanding of BPE/DU, when attention was drawn to the conflict between the Director and the World Bank. This was often contrasted with the situation in the new Department, with the Director General considered “a Bank man”.

Further, tensions between DANIDA and the World Bank, which emerged in BPEP I, continued to arise throughout the implementation process of Phase 2 of the initiative. One advisor from a new donor to the programme noted that there seemed to be a degree of conflict between the two organisations, but he was not sure where or when it started. Discussions among the donors often descended into confrontation, he explained, even if there was no clear problem. For example, during discussions about procurement criteria and the disbursement of funds, the debate was side-tracked and became a more focused argument between DANIDA and the Bank (f/n: 1/12/00). There is a strong sense of a hidden history of BPEP of which even organisations and individuals integrally involved in the initiative are unaware.

The World Bank's regulations have also been adopted as the basis for procurement for the Core Investment Plan (CIP) as a whole. This move has effectively given the Bank the power to block appointments and funding of components if it has concerns over any aspects of the programme, with approval from the Nepal Country Office required before payments can be released. This led to some confusion over what authorisation is required before implementation of activities commences. In Bardiya District, for example, the District Education Officer organised the contracting out of building work for a proposed new DEO building, based on the fact that such work had been approved as part of the Annual Strategic Implementation Plan. However, this was later questioned and brought to a halt by the Bank, who insisted that further approval of contracts relating to such work was required.

Consequently, funds available to the Ministry as part of the Technical Assistance sub-basket are often more directly accessible by the Ministry with, for example, DANIDA advisors working for BPEP in Kathmandu having the power to release funds under the auspices of technical assistance on the basis of a letter of request from the Department of Education. As a result DANIDA has come to be seen as an alternative source of funding in cases where government and individual requests have not been met through the CIP channels. For example, a Nepali consultant who had regularly worked for BPEP was blocked from taking a CIP-funded post by the Bank procurement regulations, so requested, and was granted, separate funding by DANIDA. It was noted on a number of occasions that this has led to some continuation of the BPEP practice of the Ministry "playing donors off against each other" (f/n: 11/6/00), a practice which further undermines the idea that BPEP II is a consensus-based model and that the programme is being led by, and is responsive to, government requests and needs.

Building Frameworks for Partnership: Encouraging Institutional Reform

In addition to constructing new frameworks for donor coordination, the move to BPEP II saw significant changes in the structure of the Ministry of Education, with the disbanding of the project structures and the introduction of a new Department of Education as the implementation wing of the Ministry. To assist in the shift from a project to a programme framework, a separate unit was established to assist in the transition, the Basic and Primary Education Development Unit (BPE/DU), which was to perform activities such as procurement, conducting pilot and research activities and providing technical expertise during the transition period (MOE 1999: 67).¹⁰ Such institutional change marked a very visible shift in approach, with BPEP now implemented through government structures rather than via a separate office and with long-term foreign advisors working in divisions of the Department rather than from their own project offices.

However, a recent Institutional Analysis report (Bista 2000) questions how far the new structures actually represent a shift in the balance of power over the BPEP agenda. Indeed, the establishing of a Department of Education (DOE) and the disbanding of the old project office as a prerequisite for the approval of funding could be considered to have increased the influence of the external contributors to the programme. There is a strong perception among donor and Department staff that the DOE currently “operates largely like the ‘old project office’, an agency responsible for implementing different project components of BPEP II” (Bista 2000: 37), with day-to-day work largely dictated by the need to meet the various requirements of the donors. As one long-term foreign advisor described the situation at the time of the November 2000 Donor Mission:

The Ministry and the Department have spent a considerable amount of time preparing for the donors’ mission, with all the reports to prepare. They will now have a few weeks off before they have to start getting things prepared for the next mission in March. There’s also a separate mini-mission next week on non-formal education issues... With the Dasain and Tihar holidays, the time for preparing for this last mission was limited, so there was a bit of a rush to prepare all the reports. More time seems to be spent by the Department on preparing for the missions and

¹⁰ In practice, however, the creation of the Department of Education and the restructuring of the Ministry was much more rapidly implemented than had originally been planned — the result of both EU and World Bank requests during the ‘bridging year’ between BPEPI and II to remove the previously existing project structures such as the BPE/ DU. A number of people who worked within the BPEPI structure mentioned during interviews a clash between the Director of the BPE/DU and representatives of the World Bank. This, they claimed, strengthened the Bank’s interest in dissolving the BPE/DU, as a way of removing an obstacle to getting their offer of a loan accepted, as the Director had expressed reluctance to accept the Bank’s loan, given the large sums already available in grant form from other sources.

less time is available to think about implementation, and no time to think about schools (f/n: 25/11/00).

The external source of this agenda-setting is further evidenced with reference to the way various sections of the Department and Ministry of Education referred to their own work. During my visit to the Foreign Aid Coordination Section of the Ministry, it became apparent that the role of the office was not clearly defined and that it was predominantly an artefact of the BPEP II plans rather than a body considered an integral part of the Ministry structure. Those working there seemed uncertain about what responsibility they had, with the Under-Secretary explaining that the Section was established as part of the BPEP II planning phase, created by the planning team. She noted that just before the first mission, the donors suddenly decided that the new Section had to be in place, so she was appointed to the Section without having very clear terms of reference and no office from which to work (f/n: 12/12/00).

A similar situation existed in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Section of the Department. According to a long-term foreign advisor, during a meeting the international advisors asked the ECD Section why early childhood development was important and why it was important to do it in Nepal — a genuine question, the advisor stressed, not some sort of test of their ability. The Section staff produced the document outlining strategies for ECD and presented this to her. There was no sense, the advisor felt, of why they were doing ECD, why it was important. Indeed “they appear to be doing it simply because someone had told them to” (f/n: 11/6/00).

It could be argued that both these sections were newly created and the staff only recently appointed, so some teething troubles could be expected in building the capacity at this level. It can take time for staff to become familiar with, and consequently more confident in dealing with, their particular areas of responsibility. However, within the Foreign Aid Section in particular, staff felt that they were not actually being expected to take on any real responsibility and their role was unclear to the system as a whole, not just to them. As an official in the Section noted:

The Department of Education deals with BPEP issues. This office is just required to sign papers and pass the file on to the Joint-Secretary or the Secretary. Sometimes the Director General from the DOE just passes things straight to the Secretary, but for routine and technical things the files come via this office. Depending on how sensitive the issue is, the final decision may be taken by the Secretary, Joint Secretary or it can even go up to the Minister or the Cabinet. Things keep getting passed up if people don't want to take the decision

and the responsibility. For example, this office tries to get a signature from someone above on all the letters they send to Ministry of Finance or other places outside the Ministry to ensure that they will not be held directly responsible for decisions. In some cases it is not clear who should be making decisions. For example, should the Higher Education Section or the Technical and Vocational Section deal with donors working in those sectors or should that be led by this Section? (f/n: 12/12/00).

Changes appear to have been made to fulfil requests made by the donors, rather than being the result of a strongly internalised sense of the need for change. For example, the Institutional Analysis notes that officers from the Department of Education, the institution established as a pre-requisite for the commencement of BPEP II, exhibited a “very poor understanding” of the aims and purpose of their institution (Bista 2000: 36).

The external agencies also have a considerable impact on the activities in which the Ministry and Department engage, influencing the work priorities and schedules of the various government agencies. Prior to the commencement of BPEP II, for example, a number of reports and plans had to be prepared and donor missions hosted, placing a considerable burden on the Ministry and BPE/DU and in effect stalling any work being done to implement initiatives at the school level.¹¹ Prior to the appraisal of the World Bank funding agreement, for example, a list of Bank-approved conditions had to be completed by the Ministry, including the preparation of a Program Implementation Plan.¹² A series of missions also had to be hosted by the Ministry prior to the signing of formal agreements and the commencement of the programme, a process of information request and delivery which, as the official quoted at the start of this chapter noted, continues to impact on the work schedule of the Ministry.

A significant question mark therefore remains over the degree of ‘national ownership’ that is, or could be, generated by the new approach. Much of the discussion above highlights the extent to which development activities within the MOE remain largely directed and funded by external support agencies. The shift to ‘policy-focused conditionality’ which lies at the heart of the partnership modality appears to strengthen and, crucially, make less visible, the extent of external donor influence. The establishment of the Department of Education, for

¹¹ 1998-99 therefore came to be considered a ‘bridging year’, utilised to co-ordinate the various donor pre-funding requirements and to negotiate the inter-agency relations. DANIDA did provide some funding during this period, but in effect development activities at the district and school levels came to a halt during this period.

¹² In addition, proof of agreement with the Ministry of General Administration that the Department of Education would be established had to be provided, and confirmation given that salaries of female teachers and resource people employed under BPEP I had been included in the regular budget.

example, was predominantly a donor-initiated institutional change, with the timeframe for change pushed particularly strongly by the World Bank and EU. Such a change in itself represents a heightened ability of donors to influence structural changes in national government, as well as their continued influence over the content of the activities conducted by the Department. But donor influence is less visible, in the sense that there is no longer any separate unit, with long-term advisors dispersed throughout the units of the Department, Curriculum Development Centre and other institutions of the Ministry. It is, therefore, important to turn now to the sources of knowledge privileged within the BPEP frameworks and the relationships between international and national 'experts' in Kathmandu.

Knowledge and Influence within BPEP

In examining the interactions between donors, one has to note the perceptions of comparative advantage and expertise associated with each agency. Crewe and Harrison assert that "in return for gifts or loans, recipient agencies accede to the rhetorical assertions of donor agencies, giving the false impression that the latter are the 'experts', powerful and in control" (Crewe & Harrison 1998: 90), a position that holds some relevance in the Nepal case. In this context, despite some concern about the value of external 'advice', there is tacit acceptance among Nepali officials and academics that donor-generated knowledge does represent a powerful influence on national level activity. The role of 'national expertise' is less valued and less influential on the course of the BPEP initiative than that produced by short-term, foreign consultants. However, this only goes part way to explaining the BPEP context, where inter-donor relations and perceptions of the relative expertise and the 'value-added' that each organisation brings to the initiative also impact on the content and implementation of the initiative. For example, a representative of a donor agency involved in the secondary education sub-sector, considered DANIDA to be "ridiculously invading the education sector", looking for gaps in funding and "throwing money at it", while they had "little global expertise or experience in this field" (f/n: 7/4/00).¹³ What constitutes 'legitimate' knowledge, which sources of expertise are privileged and the implications this has for understanding partnership relations will, therefore, now be considered.

Privileged Knowledge for National Programming

As was discussed in Chapter 3, certain forms of knowledge have come to dominate discussions about education and development and to influence the type and content of

intervention which it is possible for donor groups to support. In particular, the ability to draw on experiences from other national contexts and to support claims about the need for particular forms of assistance with strong statistical evidence is considered particularly authoritative. The World Bank, with its longer involvement in and broader experience of education sector reforms, both in Nepal and globally, thus has a particularly strong voice in programming debates, as models from other countries and examples of other initiatives can be used to support the case put forward. In explaining the origin and appropriateness of the District Education Planning component of BPEP II, the Bank education specialist explained that there were two main reasons for implementing this approach in Nepal. Firstly, he felt there was a “fundamentally logical” need for such an approach in Nepal, with no clear alternatives apparent. If a better option emerges then people can criticise the position taken, but, as it stands the logic for such an approach is there. Secondly, he stressed that there are “numerous examples from across the globe” of such an approach being adopted, citing the USA, Chile since the 1980s, Colombia and Brazil as examples. India’s experience of district planning was also considered influential, but there was a feeling that in Nepal it would be possible to “move further” than this (f/n: 18/12/00). The authority which stems from the sheer breadth of Bank data, the ability of its consultants to draw on evidence and experience from a range of contexts, thus makes it difficult for other agencies or the national government to challenge the positions put forward by the Bank. As a Nepali official who has attended a number of missions noted, the World Bank representative “could dictate the course of the debates all the time, he dominated the arguments and no counter-argument was possible” (f/n: 8/4/01).

The other organisations involved in BPEP II do, of course, have particular perspectives and expertise to contribute to debates.¹⁴ However, the agenda of the debates is largely on terms which ensure that those who can put forward an argument supported by global evidence will be in a stronger position.¹⁵ The global character of the broader EFA initiative which informs

¹³ While this assertion cannot be taken at face-value, it does highlight the interest of donor agencies to promote their particular vision of development. This informant clearly felt the agency he worked for had relatively greater comparative advantage in this field.

¹⁴ DANIDA, for example, has experience of initiating decentralisation initiatives in Nepal (the DASU programme, for example) and the experience gained in BPEP I also contributes to their particular strengths in advising on issues relating to BPEP II. UNICEF has considerable global experience in the provision of ECD, a major focus of their influence in BPEP, despite limited financial resources. Finland believe that they have a relatively strong position to advise on curriculum and textbook development and continuous assessment as “arguably, there exists also a fair amount of potentially useful expertise in these two areas in Finland” (Takala 1998: 3).

¹⁵ It appears that, generally, the multilateral agencies have broader experience base to draw on, with bilateral donors tending to have a more focused range of countries that they work within.

the BPEP activities reinforces this trend. The supremacy of the Bank as a source of comparable knowledge means that it is in a stronger position to present its views as the most appropriate in a given context, particularly because other agencies do not have the breadth of experience to challenge the Bank's assertions on their own terms.

This idea of the relative 'voice' of the different donors also has a much more practical side which also must be considered — who is listened to at meetings such as the missions and who is able to make their voice heard? One Nepali academic who has been employed as an EU consultant on a number of occasions explained that her voice had very little impact in the mission environment. During a discussion about women's literacy, for example, she had been told to stop being "so emotional" about the issue. The form in which she was making her points was clearly not considered appropriate for that particular forum (f/n: 29/3/00). The need for the correct form of speech is further emphasised in comments made by the JICA representative, who felt that his poor English language skills limited the extent to which he was able to actively participate in discussions. He felt that, while JICA should be "more aggressive" in the sector in order to share their experiences, his English difficulties had made it difficult for him to follow the course of donor meetings. Up till now JICA have, he feels, been more like observers in the programme and have not been in a position to shape the initiative actively (f/n: 30/11/00).¹⁶ In contrast, World Bank consultants are considered to have particularly strong communication skills in the mission context, and tend to take a leading role in the writing of reports and Aide Memoires. Thus, as one Nepali participant noted, the Aide Memoires tend to reflect the World Bank position rather than those of NORAD or DANIDA, who had officially been heading the Missions (f/n: 8/4/01). This dominance of the Bank in the shaping of policy, regardless of the day-to-day involvement of the agency in programme implementation is further reinforced by the particular way in which 'knowledge' is perceived and used in the development and implementation of BPEP II.

International and National 'Expertise'

Other donors involved in BPEP II have, however, greater space to influence the course of the programme by influencing day-to-day activities. Finland and DANIDA already have long-term advisors working within the Ministry structures and both NORAD and the EU have

¹⁶ In a discussion of Japan's provision of international aid, Sawamura notes that "Japan has been relatively quiet in international development arguments" and that there is a perception among Western donors that Japan does not speak up for itself (2001:1). He goes on to discuss, however, the apparent growth in confidence within Japan about its approach.

plans to send advisors to work for varying lengths of time on various programme components. This mechanism allows donors not only to have an input into programme implementation but also enables them to monitor their investment more closely. One long-term advisor presented her role as distinct from 'the donors', seeing the advisor's position as mediating between the "donors" and "the system".¹⁷ However, it was also acknowledged that this was a rather false distinction, as advisors were employed by donors and had to submit reports to, in this case, DANIDA twice a year. The difficulty of monitoring through the basket funding system, with control over money being lost as soon as it was placed in the project account, means that the advisors are inevitably expected to play a monitoring role (f/n: 25/11/00).¹⁸

This donor presence in the form of the advisors does not, of course, lead to the automatic acceptance of their authority. One Finnish long-term advisor discussed the difficulties he was facing as he attempted to perform his role as advisor. He recalled how he was "kept away" from meetings, and not informed when key discussions and workshops were to take place. He believed there was not much interest in what advisors could do; even with a new Director General of the DOE he felt he had to "force his way into his presence" if he wanted to discuss anything (f/n: 1/12/00). The difficulties experienced by this individual could partly be a result of his organisational attachment. Finland are widely felt, by DOE and Ministry staff, to have forced their advisor on to the government as part of their agreement, with the advisor's salary forming part of the funding package.¹⁹ While DANIDA advisors are paid directly from the agency and their salaries are not considered part of programme funding, the Finnish-supported advisor is paid from the TA funds of the programme, a point which has been well noted by Department and Ministry staff and by other advisors.

A former BPEP Director described the situation faced by the Finnish advisor as quite normal, explaining that a "culture of keeping people away" was widespread in the Nepali bureaucracy. If officials are unhappy with an individual or do not wish to involve them in activities then he or she will not be told this directly, rather the officials they wish to see will

¹⁷ She noted, for example, that during the mission the advisors were only invited to those meetings that the government were invited to, not the closed sessions for donors only.

¹⁸ It is interesting that the only core donor not planning to send advisors to the Project is the World Bank, which has tight monitoring requirements in place throughout the programme and plays a particularly dominant role in missions.

¹⁹ At the time of the research the EU were also planning to set up an office and employ both a 'local' and 'international' advisor. The funding for this is to come from the Technical Assistance (TA) budget they are providing to the TA sub-basket. Even the EU mission expenses are taken from this fund — an interesting twist on 'tied aid' (f/n: 6/00).

be 'unavailable' at times that have been arranged, or information other than that which has been explicitly requested will not be volunteered (f/n: 19/12/00). Advisors appear particularly likely to be treated in such a manner when they are not considered to have had much experience in Nepal or not to be able to draw on particularly pertinent experience. As another former Director questioned:

When have international experts ever proved themselves to know about the country? If they are really experts then they should give a seminar to show and share their expertise. Some people have been here for many years, but we have never seen anything written by them and they have never given a seminar. They just take people for drinks parties in big hotels" (f/n: 7/6/00).

While some Nepali officials question the role of external advisors and oppose the dominant stance the donors are able to take in determining the course of activities, such voices are not strong enough to challenge the continuation of the practice, with externally-funded, often poorly planned consultancies continuing to be initiated.²⁰ A significant number of influential Nepalis make substantial second incomes through assisting with consultancies. It seems unlikely that such individuals would be too vocal in challenging the status quo.²¹

The recognition of 'expertise' within BPEP appears to be based more on nationality than any proven understanding of the Nepali context. For example, the consultant sent to advise on District Education Planning (notably *after* the first round of DEPs had been prepared), made minor changes to the existing guidelines, rather than considering how to work with the model that had been prepared. The degree of expertise he brought to the initiative and the advice he could give was seriously questioned by one Nepali official who noted wryly that,

²⁰ Many activities conducted by foreign advisors and national consultants are considered of limited value even by those who have been engaged in the initiatives. For example, I was told by two international advisors about a US\$2 million initiative funded through one bilateral donor's Technical Assistance funds (but notably executed by a third party). The project aimed to provide durable textbooks for 3 pilot districts, through improving the printing press, the paper and binding quality and improving the layout and content of the books which would allow them to be reusable and thereby save money and resources. Consultants were employed and the various components of the project were developed, culminating in the preparation of copies of the books. It was only when the long-term advisors were given copies by the consultants that a significant flaw in the materials was detected. The maths and science books had been prepared as exercise books, with activities in which students were asked to write in the book, rendering them useless as reusable resources. The advisors recounting this story suggested, half jokingly, that the children could be provided with erasers to rub out any marks at the end of the year, but were generally unsurprised that such mistakes could be made (f/n: 11/6/00).

²¹ Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2002) provides a discussion of current concerns about the role of advisors from a donor perspective.

“he learned more from us than we did from him” (f/n: 4/6/00).²² Following his assessment of the planning procedures, the consultant held a feedback meeting during which he told the senior staff assembled how to rewrite the introduction to the guidelines. They “just sat there and smiled”, agreeing to what he said, then made the required changes to the documents (f/n: 4/6/00). This example is, in part, a variation on the “keeping people away” strategy discussed above. But it also highlights the perception among DOE staff that direct requests made by donors must, in some way, be met. In the case of District Planning, to be explored further in the next chapter, there is a strong sense throughout the system that it is an initiative pushed by the donors (f/n: 4/6/00). Thus the feeling that the DOE should do as requested as it was not their initiative is particularly strong. The idea that Western forms of knowledge, particularly work prepared by those from the developed world, provide more useful insights into the Nepali context than that generated internally continues to dominate much of the knowledge-based decision-making within BPEP. Indeed those ‘national experts’ whose opinions are sought and voices heard within BPEP are almost entirely foreign educated — most recently through the DANIDA-supported Institutional Linkages Programme which enabled Ministry of Education and BPEP officials to conduct PhD and Masters degree studies through Danish universities.

Consideration must also be given to the role of Nepali academics working in the field of education who could influence the agenda within the country, and provide research-based evidence of the mismatch between policy, practice and educational needs and, potentially, alternatives to the existing models of education intervention and reform. Organisations such as the Centre for Education Research, Innovation and Development (CERID) and the numerous small consultancy firms established by staff from institutions such as the Faculty of Education at Tribhuvan University and Kathmandu University, have the capacity and experience to offer more critical analyses of the current schooling and educational context of the country.²³ Indeed, in private discussions with various researchers strongly critical views of the current situation of schooling and, notably, the role of external assistance were expressed. Nonetheless, the political economy of the research environment has to be given

²² Other donors questioned the value of this intervention, noting that it was based on a very short visit by the consultant and had provided very few opportunities for feedback and the incorporation of ideas of those Department personnel who had had considerably longer experience of the initiative.

²³ A linkage programme with the University of Alberta, Canada, has allowed senior staff from CERID to conduct PhD studies at that institution. While the advantages of all the staff from one institution attending the same institution can be debated, there is a strong sense among those who have completed the course (and among those currently doing research programmes through the ILP of BPEP II) that the skills gained from such study allow them to assess more critically current educational reforms.

consideration, with the source of funding for research a crucial factor impacting on what areas can be addressed and how issues can be presented. Research funded through the regular Tribhuvan University funding mechanisms, for example, does not offer much scope for field-based research, with little financial support available for travel costs and daily expenditure required for work outside the Kathmandu Valley.²⁴ Thus organisations such as CERID are dependent on external funding, often from BPEP donors, to enable them to conduct research. The subsequent research agendas and even the findings presented are thus strongly shaped by donor interests and agendas. Partnership therefore appears dependent on the various parties sharing the same intellectual basis for decision-making and the same agenda and interests in research and consultancy.²⁵

This is not, of course, to suggest that the government has no influence over agenda-setting and directing the course of the initiative. There are, indeed, examples of attempts to influence the areas discussed at missions and to shape programme implementation in accordance to government interests. It is clear that the conflicting interests and working styles of the various external funding agencies have been well noted and there are reports of several instances where government officials have 'played the donors off against each other'. It is also significant that changes in senior personnel in the Department and Ministry lead to shifting relations between the various parties. Certain officials, notably those who had been educated abroad, spoke good English and could converse within the same knowledge paradigms as the donor representatives, appear able to direct and co-ordinate donor relations fairly effectively, and to make demands on the donors' time to a greater extent than their predecessors.

However, for alternative visions to be given consideration they must be presented within the parameters of a depoliticised framework that allows continued donor engagement. During the November 2000 Mission, for example, the Secretary of the Ministry of Local Development came to address the donors, asking for some of the BPEP money to be given to the integrated security and development programmes being implemented in the districts

²⁴ An allowance of 80rps (approx. 75p) a day is available for those conducting field research outside the Valley.

²⁵ Whether providing Nepalis with the skills to argue and debate issues within the same knowledge framework that the donors are working within will limit the role of international advisors will be an interesting trend to track in the future, a key marker of the extent donors really are prepared to make themselves less 'visible' in the aid process.

worst affected by the Maoist insurgency.²⁶ The reaction to this, however, highlights the difference in working styles and interests of the government and the donors, and thus the difficulties HMG faced in influencing the agenda. According to Nepali officials who attended the meeting, the donors appeared to be “taken aback” by the request as they had not discussed the Maoist issue at all and were therefore “surprised” by the request. At the closing session the donor representatives stated that they were not able to act on the request immediately, and that the issue should be given some thought and acted upon within the forum of the local donors’ meeting.²⁷ This issue was not within the terms of reference that consultants, brought in to represent specific agencies, had been given, and thus there was a feeling among some that they did not have the authority to make this decision. This is also an explicitly political issue that would call into question the avowedly neutral stance taken by the donor community.

In addition, it must be recalled that BPEP is not the only programme being implemented by the Ministry and the BPEP donors are not the only external agencies with whom agreement has to be reached, despite the dominance the programme appears to have within the Ministry. The Asian Development Bank (ADB), for example, have funded a number of significant interventions including the Primary Education Development Project and Secondary Education Development Project (SEDP). DFID, and formerly ODA, provided support to the latter in the form of a technical support through the Secondary Education Project (SEP) (SEP/SEDP 1997).

Nonetheless, BPEP, as the largest intervention in the sector, remains the most influential of the externally-supported initiatives, as evidenced by the extent to which it has influenced changes in the institutional structures and attempted to change how the government relates to other donors. The creation of the DOE, ostensibly an agency to implement initiatives across the whole spectrum of the education sector, was planned and executed with no significant

²⁶ Since 1996 the underground CPN (Maoist) has been waging a ‘People’s War’ in an attempt to challenge the existing political structures and to have their demands discussed. Originally targeting the poorer districts of the mid-west, the insurgency has become increasingly violent and geographically widespread. As the insurgency gains momentum, the implications of the Maoists’ demands and direct actions have been felt throughout Nepal, with schools and foreign-supported initiatives among the targets focused on by the rebels and the student unions affiliated to them. The specific impact this movement has had on BPEP and in the district in east Nepal that this study focused on is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7.

²⁷ In response, the donors reconstructed the expressed concerns as one of getting the mechanisms for implementation correct, stating that new modalities for delivery of services in the affected districts would be explored. Such a position ignores the broader issue of Maoist opposition to foreign involvement in schooling.

discussions being held with non-BPEP parties and without consideration of the timeframes within which other sub-sectoral activities, particularly secondary education reforms, were being considered. As the Director of the Secondary Education Project noted, “BPEP is distorting the system”, with its greater financial role and corresponding ability to influence the activities and set the work agenda of the Department and Ministry. In the case of the ADB’s Teacher Education Project,²⁸ despite strong protests by the BPEP group, the MOE and the Ministry of Finance agreed to the loan. The BPEP group, in the April 2001 Aide Memoire, continued its attempt to draw the initiative into BPEP, with a strongly emphasised recommendation that “future ADB support to Teacher Education from 2002/03 onwards be co-planned with the CIP support and reflected in the budget” (Aide Memoire 6/4/01: 3).²⁹

Thus, while alternative views, priorities and practices may be put forward by the government agencies or by other projects operating within the sector, the question of the relative significance of funding provision remains salient and impacts on the influence that particular groups have within the system. As Crewe and Harrison note:

There is an obvious power imbalance between the giver and the receiver of money, especially if the funds always go in the same direction. The power inequalities, however, do not determine the behaviour of those involved... Rather the impact of the practices of each group are conditioned by their place in power structures (Crewe & Harrison 1998: 77).

Attention must also be focused on the dynamics of inter-donor relationships, where struggles are less about financing and more about the relative influence, expertise and ‘comparative advantage’ attributed to particular organisations. There remains, however, a need to move away from a focus on organisations as singular entities, operating in a coherent manner, and initiate an exploration of the multiple, and potentially conflicting, interests of those working within the various BPEP-related agencies.

Understanding Conflicting Interests Within Institutions

The partnership-based model starts from the assumption that inter-institutional relationships are key to understanding decision-making processes and issues of equality and power in

²⁸ HMG Nepal and the ADB signed a Memorandum of Understanding for completing final preparations for the project in March 2001.

²⁹ This relationship between donors and the government must, however, be seen in a cross-sectoral context. For example, the ADB, with its considerable involvement and large-scale funding commitments in a range of fields, was able to utilise its links with the Ministry of Finance to secure acceptance of its Teacher Education Programme loan, despite the fact that the form of teacher education the government actually wished to adopt was still under discussion. Here, an issue which was not a clear government priority was accepted as funding was attached.

interactions. But intra-institutional relations — the differences of opinion and conflicting interests of individuals within organisations — also have an important bearing on the course of the BPEP initiative. This section therefore turns the spotlight on to inter-personnel relations, to examine how individuals interact within and between agencies and consider the impact that individual interests and actions have on development interventions.

Friends and Subordinates: Understanding the Nepali Bureaucracy

Justice refers to ‘traditional patterns’ in Nepali administrative behaviour, “complex, deeply rooted informal networks based on regional identities, ethnic and caste distinctions and family ties that still exert powerful influences on how things are done” (Justice 1986: 20). Despite attempts by foreign assistance agencies to import the principles of administration based on “Western concepts of efficiency, economy and rational decision-making” (Rose and Landau 1977: 42-3, cited in Justice 1986: 21), the Nepali system remains largely hierarchical, she claims, with certain elite groups and families being given particular privileges and responsibilities. This analysis, 15 years on, still resonates significantly with the current situation, although, in the changed political context, party political allegiances have become a further marker of informal linkages and patronage-like relations. (See Chapters 5 and 6). The idea of people being either ‘friends or subordinates’ permeates not just relationships within the bureaucracy, but influences how people in various contexts characterise their relations with others.³⁰

Individual interests and concerns with securing promotion, or at least maintaining a favourable position within Kathmandu offices, have an important influence on how individuals working within the Ministry or Department of Education act, what initiative they feel able to display and the responsibility they wish to take for activities. Concern with actually achieving stated goals, such as the improvement of schooling provision, are often of secondary importance to the interest in ensuring one’s own continued employment and, particularly, a job in a desirable posting. The limited personal interest of MOE or donor employees in improving the government education system has been noted by a number of people interviewed in the course of the study. In particular, the fact that the vast majority of

³⁰ One former BPEP Director told me that if I needed any help contacting people in the Ministry then I should ask him as people there were either his ‘friends or subordinates’. This concept emerged at various points in the study; a head teacher in one of the study villages, for example, informed me that he would be able to help as he had many friends in the area, and many others had been his students, implying that he would still maintain a position of authority in their eyes. This issue is explored further in the following chapter in relation to moves towards greater participation in and decentralisation of education planning and administration.

MOE employees (at both the central and district levels) send their own children to private, English-medium schools means that they have no direct or personal link with the situation they are attempting to change; as a World Bank official noted “the person who wears the suit knows where it pinches” (f/n: 19/8/99).

There is a tendency for outside observers to emphasise the role of personal linkages within the Nepali bureaucracy, with Dor Bahadur Bista’s *Fatalism and Development* (1991) frequently referred to as a text which gives an insight into why development activities are so rarely successful. These forms of relationships are generally problematised and seen as a barrier to effective implementation. During an informal dinner, for example, a group of foreigners working in the education sector discussed Bista’s book, highlighting in particular his discussion of the prevalence of favours being advanced on the basis of *aphno manche* (familial relations) and *chakari* (patronage ties). One mentioned that such a viewpoint provided a good way of understanding what was going on within the Ministry. Another agreed, “Yes, it’s good to realise that it is not just in your office that things happen in such a way” (f/n: 11/6/00). The ‘culture’ of the bureaucracy is therefore presented as a barrier to the effective and efficient implementation of development initiatives. This vision of the problematic ‘culture’ of the Nepali bureaucracy as a constraint on effective implementation has as its implicit referent a neutral, ‘culture-free’ development-oriented bureaucracy in which all participants are working for the same goals.³¹ However, as the following discussion will highlight, the donor agencies too are strongly infused with divisions between organisational and personal interests which also impacts on programme implementation.

Divisions in Donor Organisations

There is a tendency within the BPEP context to equate the in-country donor representative directly with the aims and interests of the organisation as a whole. During BPEP I there was a high level of continuity of donor staff, with the largest donors (DANIDA and the World Bank) maintaining the same key staff throughout the period. As a former BPEP Director noted “We see Erik as DANIDA and Brajesh as the World Bank, but it has to be remembered that they are just employees, and also have to consider their own careers” (f/n: 23/3/00). Here a key point is raised, the need to differentiate between individual and organisational goals and to distinguish when these differing interests may actually be at odds. The distinctive culture of development agencies and the norms which inform the day-

³¹ This discussion parallels that of Chapter 3, with the ‘rational’ character of the donors’ interventions juxtaposed with the ‘irrational’ and ‘tradition-laden’ working style of the recipient government.

to-day activities and actions taken by international consultants must be considered, and the vision of a unified organisation working towards neutral goals unpacked.

Differences of opinion clearly exist within any given donor organisation, with in-country staff frequently voicing criticism of the broader organisational stance. During discussions with a group of DANIDA advisors concern was expressed over the way the organisation “just wanted to spend money in Nepal”. Since India initiated nuclear testing in 1998, DANIDA had withdrawn support and thus had to redeploy and spend the excess budget in Nepal. Such a shift had led, the advisors felt, to a focus on the disbursement of funds as opposed to a targeted response to the specific needs of Nepal (f/n:4/6/00). This implicit criticism and distancing of their own views from those of the organisation as a whole was further emphasised when the discussion turned to the increased focus on partnership-based approaches to aid delivery. They noted that “some people, like [an official based in Copenhagen], actually believe that there can be partnership between government and donors”, implying that they, the in-country advisors, did not (f/n: 4/6/00).

The strong hierarchy and decision-making chain evident in donor agencies does, however, limit the extent to which dissenting voices are raised. One international consultant described how, in informal settings, individuals would openly voice their reservations at the direction being taken by the BPEP initiative. Yet these same individuals would rarely express such concerns and share their in-country experience in the context of the formal meetings, tending to follow the instructions passed down from their central office (f/n: 8/4/01). In a similar way to the Nepali officials, individual success and progression through a desired career path is largely dependent on showing success within the given frame of reference. Given the risks of failure of development initiatives, it may therefore be prudent for staff to diffuse accountability and responsibility for decisions by operating within the frameworks given to them, rather than questioning or deviating from them.

Related to this is the issue of the commitment of advisors to the particular project or country where they are working. Even ‘long-term advisors’ may be based in Nepal for as little as two years, although a few have, notably, been engaged with the project for up to 5 years.³² The personal interests in involvement in BPEP must, then, be considered. While some advisors did express genuine concern about the educational provision in Nepal and a desire

³² The donor staff who had been engaged in the initiative for such relatively long periods have all now left the programme, and indeed left Nepal.

to improve it in some form this was often coupled with despair at the speed of change and their inability to influence the course of events. The BPEP initiative did, however, offer an opportunity for individuals to explore new approaches, to gain experience of a different national context and thus provided a stepping stone to other career opportunities. One advisor was particularly open about his role and interests, explaining that while he felt he was not able to make any valuable contribution to the reform of education, he was thoroughly enjoying being based in Nepal and the lifestyle this line of work offered him (f/n: 1/12/00). The donor 'culture' can also be explored in relation to the expectations that organisations have of how staff should live and act whilst working in Nepal, with this lifestyle having a significant impact on the interaction which is possible between Nepali and international staff. Justice (1986) highlights the contrast in lifestyle, most dramatically evident in terms of housing and the availability of private transport, between even relatively affluent Nepalis and foreign advisors and consultants, a division which remains strongly evident today.

The interface between the cultures of the Nepali and donor bureaucracies is therefore a further area which requires consideration — and one which is frequently conflict-laden and problematic, with a lack of mutual respect evident. As was noted above, senior Nepali officials raised questions about the ability of external consultants to understand the Nepal context and often resented the imposed 'expertise' of people who knew little of the culture, political context and language of the country. Similarly, donor representatives often showed little respect for the abilities of Nepali staff.³³ An example of the rather dismissive perceptions that some advisors hold of their Nepali counterparts is evident in the following extract from my fieldnotes:

After talking for some time in the office, I walked with [a long-term foreign advisor] down to the canteen for lunch. The system was such that money was given to one man in exchange for a meal coupon, with food distributed through a hatch in the wall. A party of people had arrived at the same time as us, so inevitably there was a bit of a scrum at the hatch, especially as there were no *roti* prepared. The advisor got highly irritated by the fairly chaotic scene so, when one man attempted to push passed him to hand his ticket in to the kitchen, he put his arm across the hatch and, with the other hand, shooed the man away, telling him loudly and firmly in English, "NO! You must queue. NO!" The man looked shocked and went back to talk to the ticket counter staff. The advisor

³³ One foreign advisor introduced me to a colleague as "the only person doing a PhD on BPEP", at which point I explained that there were also a number of Nepalis currently doing PhDs on issues relating to BPEP. His response that "well, you're the only one doing a proper PhD" highlights a wider devaluation of the research capacity within Nepal (f/n: 19/9/01).

turned to me, “You know, manners and queuing should be taught in schools here” he said (f/n: 1/12/00).

Such incidents highlight a key issue which is rarely addressed in donor discourses, the extent to which ‘partnership’ is possible at the level of individual interactions in the programme context. The partnership rhetoric tends to emphasise agreement and co-operation between organisations, with little consideration given to the nature of the day-to-day interface between the organisations — the individual relations and interactions between employees. As has been discussed above, there is much in the culture of the different organisations and the lifestyles of staff which sustains divisions, rather than promotes mutual understanding and co-operation. Rather than starting at the level of policy changes and constructing a framework of co-operation and partnership between organisations in abstraction, it is perhaps time to consider what partnership at the ‘bottom’ of the institutional structure looks like and how ties and co-operation at this crucial layer could be strengthened.

Promoting Project Success: Partnership as Façade?

There is a strong sense that BPEP II is yet another ‘new beginning’ for Nepal’s education system, with emphasis placed on the novelty of the funding mechanisms, the contribution of new donors to the system, and the new institutional structures, committees and staff positions. This focus on ‘novelty’ limits the responsibility of those donors previously involved in the initiative, presenting a new point from which all partners take on collective responsibility. In addition, this ‘new approach’ has been strongly endorsed at a global level, with partnership models underpinning the policy statements of many of the donor agencies, a move which places considerable pressure on those working on national level initiatives to show it is workable and a ‘success’ in practice. These pressures lead to certain aspects of the relationships which surround the BPEP initiative being given particular emphasis, in order to stress both the innovative nature of the approach and the ‘success’ it is generating. Thus, creating a façade of partnership appears to take precedence over examining and working with the complexity of relations and interests in the particular context.

One can question the value of stressing the ‘novelty’ of the approach on the grounds that it limits the extent to which insights and experience gained from previous interventions can be fed into BPEP II. It should, of course, be noted that some aspects of the ‘new’ approach are certainly not as novel as presented. Decreasing donor visibility is an issue which has been focussed on at various points by different agencies. For example, during their involvement in the education sector reforms of the 1950s and 1960s, USAID attempted to decrease their

visibility by contracting out hospital and school construction through the relevant government departments (Justice 1986: 32).³⁴ In addition the involvement of American assistance in the development of the policies and institutions of Nepal's first national education system in the 1950s resembles, in many respects, the currently dominant 'sector-wide approaches', with the whole education system, rather than just a sub-sector, the focus of intervention.

More significantly, the sense, on either the donor or government side, of building on, or even acknowledging, an 'institutional memory' is somewhat limited by this construction of BPEP II as a 'new' approach. As one former BPEP Director noted, "If you wanted to buy a computer, would you go to the shop and look at what was available, or start again trying to invent and build one from scratch?" (f/n: 15/12/00). BPEP II was, he felt, doing just that, starting all over again, rather than building on the experiences gained in the earlier interventions. Another former Director, now working for one of the donor agencies, confirmed this lack of understanding of the history of intervention in his discussion of a field trip conducted during the November 2000 Mission. On a visit to schools and a Resource Centre in Jhapa there was little awareness of the length of involvement of donors in this area, with delegates discussing the situation as though it was the second year of donor involvement, not the 14th year of continuous project inputs (f/n: 13/12/00).³⁵ The significant personnel shifts in recent years, particularly arising from the institutional changes at the start of BPEP II, have led to a loss of continuity and expertise. For example, as one official informed me, during BPEP I considerable effort was made to collect and organise district and school data for the whole education sector, with information used to inform GIS mapping of schools. With the changes in the system, most of the staff involved in this work have left (two are currently studying overseas, another is attempting to get funding for further study). "Nothing exists anymore", an official who had helped with the processing informed me. "All the data, and even the computer it was stored on, has disappeared". Further, he added, "How can we trace this? Who cares? No one knows that it ever existed!" (f/n: 8/4/01). The emphasis on a new phase and a new approach led people within the Department structure to think they were starting something different — a programme approach. There was thus a sense among BPEP staff that they were being expected to

³⁴ Justice contrasts this approach with that taken by the Canadians who were highly visible during the construction of the health worker training institutes in Dhankuta and Surkhet in the 1970s (Justice 1986: 32).

³⁵ Jhapa has been a project district since the initiation of PEP.

reinvent things, with those lessons which had been learned during the PEP and BPEP I initiatives “promptly forgotten”.

There is also considerable pressure on individuals and people in certain roles to present activities as ‘successful’ and as fitting within the required paradigm, despite widespread recognition by both government and donor staff of the disjuncture between policy and practice. “Fieldwork is not really taking shape” , “DEPs have been disastrous as a planning exercise” and “there is little evidence of BPEP at the school level” are just some of the comments made by staff when discussing the initiative. However, the need to show that new approaches such as basket funding and decentralised planning can be operationalised is very strong. During a discussion of the implementation of district education planning (to be discussed further in the next chapter), one donor representative remarked that, “Donors and consultants were driven by pressure to show success, to say ‘Yes, we can pull it off’” (f/n: 7/4/00).

The manner in which activities and relationships are presented within the BPEP framework thus takes on special significance in order to give the appearance of partnership regardless of the actual conflicts, debates and differences in working style. As one donor consultant noted “Donors are obsessed with co-ordination and consensus. There’s a lot at stake and there’s real pressure to demonstrate to headquarters and the aid community that the donors involved can handle implementing a sector programme and consensus building” (f/n: 8/4/01). Much of the public face of BPEP, the way it is presented to those not directly involved in implementation (including donor representatives from headquarters) is in many senses just that, a front or gloss on the complexity of what is going on in the offices of the Ministry and in schools across the country. Consequently, the Aide Memoires prepared at missions and other project documents are used to emphasise the desired consensus as opposed to acknowledge the divisions and differences between the various parties. Such documents rarely attribute particular interests or the focus on specific issues to named individuals or organisations, regardless of any debate or disagreement which may have taken place. For example, in the November 2000 Mission, one of the consultants particularly wished to stress AIDS education and the important role that BPEP should play in promoting greater awareness of related issues (see Aide Memoire 24/11/00). This received a mixed reaction from others present, with some questioning of how much of a priority this area should be. One of the long-term advisors present at the meeting later discussed this example of an individual stressing their own interests in the mission setting, remarking that “while it may

satisfy donors to see something included there [in the Aide Memoire], it doesn't mean that things will seriously be considered, far less implemented" (f/n: 25/11/00).

Other components of the programme are also considered to be of predominantly emblematic value, included in order to give the impression that certain activities are prioritised and being given due consideration in the implementation process. The Institutional Analysis, for example, highlights how training workshops are considered only "symbolic" exercises, not of any intrinsic value as fora for learning or sharing of ideas (Bista 2000: 57). Similarly the "Monitoring and Evaluation Sections/Units have been kept as a showpiece. These Sections/Units are given neither authority to work in terms of developing work plans nor adequate resources" (Bista 2000: 59). A similar analysis could be made of the EFA Forum held in the Ministry as part of the preparation of the EFA 2000 Country Report, where emphasis was placed on presenting Nepal in as positive a light as possible, with delegates expressly criticising the negative tone taken in the first draft presented to them (f/n: 10/12/99). What this means for the promotion of 'genuine partnership' is unclear. With the decision made by donors at a global level that partnership, consensus-based models should form the basis for aid provision, the pressure to show that it can work at the country level remains strong. Indeed, there is a sense that BPEP is important for the donors involved largely as an example of their ability to operate this form of intervention, to show that it is possible to operationalise this new way of working. As one long-term advisor described the situation, "Perhaps the donors need Nepal more than Nepal needs the donors... It would create an international scandal if the donors were to pull out. Despite the problems we cannot pull out" (f/n: 1/12/2000).

The significance of the aesthetics of development — the need to present actions as part of a wider engagement with a project of development in order to advance particular interests — is further highlighted through the discussion of district and school level engagement with both the BPEP initiative and schooling more broadly, to which I now turn. Taking up the themes of the multiple visions of the development intervention and the centrality of the perceived role of donors as agents of change in shaping intra-state relations, the next chapter explores the process of District Education Planning, a key component of the BPEP II initiative. In doing so, the perception of the state as a monolithic institution with a singular interest in attempting educational reform will be further unpacked through the examination of relationships between the various institutions engaged in the management and delivery of schooling within one district.

Chapter 5

Promoting Participation: Exploring District Education Planning Processes

Piles of paper, covered in hand drawn tables, were scattered across the tables. Resource People¹ sat tapping numbers into calculators and checking their results with the person sitting next to them. Numbers were shouted across the room and questions raised about the exceptionally high net enrolment ratios (NER), with figures of 112, 108 and 110 emerging for some VDC areas.² One RP attempted to raise these inaccuracies as serious concerns, questioning the validity of the population statistics. The bazaar area he was responsible for had experienced particularly dramatic population growth and his results appeared most inaccurate.³ The other officials in the room were unwilling to engage in debate about the figures. They expressed concern with getting the job done quickly so they could go home. The disparity in the statistics became a source of amusement, explained in terms of the superior staff and hence better education provision in Dhankuta. "Schools here are so good that we can educate more children than there are!" quipped one, while another thought that their good performance could lead to them having to give money to other districts, instead of being given any themselves from Kathmandu. Others joked that they would be sent to Rukum and Rolpa⁴ to help improve education in the Maoist affected areas, as they had done such a good job in Dhankuta. Throughout this exchange the Project Coordinator sat smoking at his desk, poring over the papers, but not contributing to the number-crunching work beyond a few wry comments about the NER figures. In response to a query from one of the school supervisors, he read out the instructions for the planning process that he had received from Kathmandu, telling people that as the budget ceilings had been set at the centre, the planning was really to decide which districts were selected as project sites. He stressed the need to complete the planning by the weekend as they had to send the report to Kathmandu so that the donors could look at it and approve the funding (f/n: 9/11/00, see also Photograph 4).

¹ Schools within a district are divided into 'clusters' of approximately 15 government schools, with each cluster assigned to a Resource Centre. There are 19 Resource Centres in Dhankuta District.

² Net Enrolment Ratios should be a maximum of 100, the number of school goers as a proportion of the number of children of school-going age.

³ A blanket population growth rate had been used for the whole district, with rural-urban migration and other locality specific factors not being considered.

⁴ Districts in Mid-Western Nepal which have experienced the most sustained Maoist activity since the insurgency began in 1996.

Introduction

This scene, depicting the process of revising the District Education Plan (DEP) in the eastern hill district of Dhankuta during autumn 2000, highlights a considerable shift in attitude and approach from the initial planning process conducted the previous year. The introduction of the exercise in autumn 1999 had been met with enthusiasm by DEO staff, with the collection of school and Resource Centre data undertaken fairly comprehensively. District Education Office staff, such as the Project Coordinator⁵ (PC) and Resource People (RPs), had expressed notable pride in the document they produced and, while recognising that there were limitations to the report, felt that it was a piece of work with which they could be pleased.⁶ The fact that the Dhankuta Plan had been translated into English for the donors to read (Dhankuta 2000) was also interpreted by the District officials as a sign that the report had been well received by the central government and, particularly, the donor agencies.⁷ By autumn 2000 enthusiasm for the process had, however, waned considerably. The revision of the Plan came to be viewed as a job to be completed to meet demands from the central authorities and to secure the release of funds from donors: the sense of ownership over the process which had been evident during preparation of the initial plan had greatly diminished. Concern over the accuracy and implications of the results was limited, with the disparities in figures becoming the source of jokes rather than a focus of concern.

Exploring the District Education Planning process in a particular locale and tracking the decline in enthusiasm for the initiative at all levels offers a fascinating story in itself. It also, however, provides a lens through which to examine the wider issues of how various layers of the education system, from the central Ministry to the school, are incorporated into the BPEP programme and the assumptions about the state and the promotion of participation which underpin the intervention. Through this chapter the multiple, and often competing, layers of interest in the DEP process will be highlighted, to challenge the assumption of a shared vision of education reform which dominates the BPEP rhetoric. I examine how the scope for involvement offered by the process has been interpreted and acted upon in a variety of ways,

⁵ There was a shift in personnel in the summer of 2000. The PC who had led the initial planning exercise was transferred to another area and a new PC drafted in. The significantly different attitudes of these two individuals to the DEP initiative may also have influenced the commitment and enthusiasm felt towards the revision process.

⁶ This was particularly evident when they received a copy of the completed report and the PC informed officials that their document was the “fattest” of all the reports containing more pages than those submitted by other districts (Dhankuta 2000).

⁷ A few reports were translated for the use of in-country donor personnel and the donor representatives attending the missions. The reports selected represented a cross-section of reports, of varying quality from across the country.

often at odds with the framework for participation envisaged in the *Program Implementation Plan*. In particular, the centrality of the donor agencies, the high degree of visibility of external agencies within the district, draws attention to the use made of development intervention as a tool through which to advance particular interests. The donors become a further source of potential patronage, a form of connection with something 'other' than the local and thus a source of influence. Consequently, I argue, the DEP process must be seen in relation to those networks of participation which already act as channels of communication and influence: District Education Planning was not introduced into a vacuum, with existing ties such as familial links and party-political affiliations influencing how the initiative was interpreted and utilised. Thus, on the one hand, district planning acts as a mechanism for extending existing top-down supervision and regulation, reinforcing the authority of the central state and the donor community. On the other, the process has been used by groups attempting to enhance their relative influence, with the emphasis on connections with the donors seen as a counter to central government power. Connections with 'the external' remain a primary source of influence and enhanced opportunities.

In exploring the relationships that influence participation in District Education Planning in Nepal it becomes clear that the very engagement with participatory practices has become a source of power and status for individuals and groups, a marker of differentials in access to resources and decision-making powers. The rhetoric and practice of participation must be seen in relation to the networks of power and influence in which it is embedded. Thus, before turning to the specifics of the Nepali example, I wish to examine the relations of unequal influence and power inherent in the dominant discourses of participation which are obscured by the rhetoric of equality and expanding participation.

Promoting Participation: The Global Agenda

Since the 1990s, the global development agenda has focused more explicitly on the promotion of participation. Indeed this approach can even be considered to have become the "new orthodoxy" (Stirrat 1996). Participatory approaches were developed to address development needs in a way which broke from the existing dominant paradigm of top-down models of planning and implementation, an approach epitomised by Chambers' discussion of the relative influence of "uppers" and "lowers" in development programming and the need to reappraise the expert-recipient relationship (Chambers 1997, see also 1983, 1995). The emerging focus on poverty elimination and the need for 'people-centred' development found its methodological corollary in participatory approaches to programme planning,

implementation and evaluation. From a position that sought to overturn existing power relations, to “put the last first”, the rhetoric and practice of participation has become widely utilised by, for example, the World Bank and other multi- and bilateral agencies. As Kothari notes, there now appears to be no alternative, no counter to participation. “It is implicitly good, constructive and productive”, the apparent solution to concerns over inequalities in the development relationship (Kothari 2001: 148, see also Nelson and Wright 1995).⁸

The Power of Participation

Participatory approaches to development intervention emerge from a particular interpretation of power relations in decision-making processes, a critique which sees power and the ability to influence change located in the hands of some groups and individuals to the exclusion of others. There is a strong spatial element to the characterisation of relations and access to resources and influence, with ‘local communities’ and groups geographically as well as socially distant from centres of (visible) decision-making the focus of attention and the prime beneficiaries of this approach. From this largely spatial view of communities and decision-making networks, groups are considered to be fairly ‘bounded’, sharing common interests and goals, with a consensus position regarded as (potentially) achievable by a collective based in a particular locale. Promoting beneficiary participation such as “open consultations in public village meetings” (World Bank 1999c: 13) is therefore seen as a way of ensuring the voice of the community is heard and their needs addressed.

In many respects ‘community participation’ can be viewed as a mechanism that enables previously non-legible perspectives to be slotted into development programming, as an extension to, rather than a counter or alternative to, existing administrative structures. The creation of formal mechanisms for sustained participation such as user groups or committees (as opposed to one-off participatory exercises) provides a means for the ‘voice’ of those previously excluded to be heard in a form that will allow it to be encompassed into wider planning structures. A process of translation takes place with the ‘illegible’, the informal communication links and networks not given conceptual space in development planning, moulded into a form which is deemed manageable by those in more influential positions vis-

⁸ For example, the World Development Report 1998-1999, *Knowledge for Development*, calls for the incorporation of the ‘views of the poor’ into programme and project assessments through ‘beneficiary participation’ (World Bank 1999c: 13). Such articulations of the participation rhetoric can be considered somewhat problematic. The Bank’s current ‘participatory’ approach to the preparation of PRSPs, for instance, has been widely critiqued on the grounds that the process has only involved limited consultation exercises and the space for challenging or changing proposals is minimal. The

à-vis resources and decision-making. This raises perhaps the key point regarding the current interest in participation — the power dynamic inherent in, but masked by, the very concept of participation.

The archetypal model of participatory approaches is the practice of ‘Participatory Rural Appraisal’ (PRA) which aims to give greater ‘voice’ to those perceived to be marginalised by traditional approaches to development.⁹ It has itself been subject to scrutiny in relation to the power relationships which are inherent in the research and implementation practices that it constitutes (e.g. Francis 2001, Mosse 1994, 2001, Kothari 2001, Henkel and Stirrat 2001). The frameworks and forms of knowledge deemed as appropriate for inclusion in such an exercise do not emerge spontaneously from the community of participants, but are a result of the performance of a series of exercises sanctioned by the PRA practitioner. “Local knowledge” is in effect “cleaned up” and filtered through a range of mapping and categorising activities, with anything considered too messy or controversial marginalised or omitted (Kothari 2001).

This is particularly clearly emphasised in the way activities must conform to particular frameworks if they are to be recognised as fitting within the participatory paradigm. Certainly, PRA opens up additional avenues through which to develop an understanding of communities, and offers the chance to gain insights that would not be possible through traditional top-down approaches to data collection (Francis 2001: 82). However, only certain forms of participation are included within programme documentation. Visible and measurable forms of active involvement in decision-making, such as the preparation of particular outputs of PRA mapping exercises or the presence of committees and user groups, are required as a marker of programme success. PRA “is always a performance sponsored by the observer / practitioner” (Kothari 2001: 149).¹⁰ In the case of BPEP¹¹, the establishment

‘power of the purse’ remains firmly in the hands of the Bank. On-going discussion and analysis of the PRSP process can be found at <http://www.brettonwoodsproject.org>

⁹ Chambers refers to PRA as a “family of approaches and methods to enable rural people to share, enhance, and analyze their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act” (Chambers 1994: 953, cited in Francis 2001: 76).

¹⁰ The power of personality also permeates participatory approaches, with Robert Chambers firmly established as an almost mythical ‘leader’. During a REFLECT class held by a NGO in the Far West of Nepal, a photograph of Chambers was produced and participants were given a brief biography of the man who had opened up this opportunity to them (Marsden *pers. com.*). Henkel and Stirrat (2001:178) discuss this almost religious dimension to the way PRA has been adopted by some adherents.

¹¹ While recognising that BPEP does not explicitly draw on PRA approaches, it does highlight the ways in which the ideas behind PRA and the move to more participatory and decentralised approaches to planning have been adopted by large-scale, donor-funded initiatives.

of Village Education Committees (VECs) and the strengthening of School Management Committees (SMCs) are presented as important markers of increasing participation at the sub-district level. At the central level, expanded consultation and greater opportunities for involvement in decision-making are also only recognised when made visible in the form of seminars and workshops. Forms of communication and decision-making which do not fit neatly into legible categories are not recognised or considered within the programme frameworks and so cannot be factored into any understanding of actual practice.¹²

In addition, there remains an almost ‘panoptic’ dimension to the process, with PRA practitioners able to select the data that fits into their framework from the vast array of possible information and webs of relationships that exist in any given locale. The local community has little control over how data that has been extracted is utilised in the broader policy-oriented or academic environment. This selection of data and forms of information that fit the chosen framework leads to attention being focused primarily on the ‘normal’ as opposed to those events and practices that are more contingent and shifting. Further, despite the stated aim of inclusion, the form this takes ensures the continued dominance of a consensus vision of community relations and the assumption that a common point of agreement can be reached, if only people are given the opportunity to discuss issues.¹³ As has been noted in relation to the use of one popular PRA tool:

The whole process of ‘community mapping’ is dependent, implicitly, on a concept of the social that is based on individuals entering into a form of social contract with each other and denies pre-existing forms of hierarchy, dependency or powerlessness. Upon this basis the whole apparatus of ‘modern’ society — committees, officials, elections, and so on — is constructed (Henkel and Stirrat 2001: 182).

¹² The forms of knowledge and the decision-making practices which are legitimised and given conceptual space within a ‘participatory’ approach are thus determined by those in positions of relative power. As Henkel and Stirrat note, “the framework that is supplied by the PRA method is very clearly set by PRA documents. The participants are expected to draw their ‘own’ maps, matrices, etc. The framework of these representations, however, is never in question” (2001: 180).

¹³ Interestingly, this is also the case in the collection and collating of data at ‘higher’ levels of decision-making. During a UNICEF South Asia Regional Office meeting to discuss indicators to be used for assessing progress towards EFA, participants were asked to consider how an indicator of qualitative improvement could be developed. While participants expressed concern over whether such an indicator was viable, they were encouraged to complete the exercise, as there had been time scheduled for them to do so. Participants were aware that what the visiting official from UNICEF headquarters would take away was not their concerns and questions about the usefulness of the task, but the flip chart sheet containing their suggestions, and the ability to argue that the final outcome was based on the results of a participatory consultation process.

Thus a significant tension is apparent in participatory approaches. While heralded as a more egalitarian, flexible and open approach to development planning, the need for legible participation actually fixes and constrains the way relationships and social processes can be understood and a high degree of “rigidity” remains in the methodology (Kothari 2001: 148).

The prevalence of ‘participatory’ approaches also effectively limits the parameters within which choices can be made. There is, for example, little scope within a ‘participatory’ framework to understand active non-participation. People are only ‘empowered’ if they engage in the prescribed activities, with non-participation not recognised as a conscious choice but rather an act of ignorance. This is clearly evidenced in the Nepal case, where parents’ non-participation in school meetings is constructed by teachers and development practitioners alike as the result of ignorance and a lack of understanding of the importance of education. In discussions with parents, however, it becomes clear that their non-involvement is a considered decision. They do not feel that they will be taken seriously by the teachers and thus do not want to put themselves in a position that will make them feel inferior. The *BPEP Program Implementation Plan* itself emphasises that non-participation is not an option for communities, as:

The program assumes the support of local communities, local authorities, NGOs and parents ... Illiteracy and poverty is rampant among the target populations. If the program is not able to address these issues, program implementation is very likely to suffer ... The program has planned to empower local communities and disadvantaged groups through community mobilization and training programs. This will ensure active participation and mitigate the risk of likelihood of community non-participation (MOE 1999: 58).

With participation presented as a self-evident ‘good’, the basis for challenging the framework is removed. Non-participation is therefore interpreted as deviance or as arising from ignorance and a lack of understanding of the benefits of the initiative.¹⁴

Promoting Participation Through Decentralisation

The widening interest in participatory approaches has been accompanied in the late 1990s by an increased focus on ‘good governance’ and the promotion of the role of ‘civil society’ in development activities (Robinson 1999, DANIDA 2000, UNICEF 1999, DFID Nepal 2000, Forster & Stokke 1999, World Bank 1997, 1999c). The move by donors to work more

¹⁴ A discussion of non-participation in a vaccination programme in west Nepal highlights a similar scenario where non-participation is not considered to be a rational choice and is thus not regarded as a legitimate response (Harper and Tarnowski 2000).

closely with national governments as part of sector and sub-sector-wide approaches and increase the involvement of NGOs and local communities in decision-making, has resulted in the re-emergence of interest in decentralisation as a framework through which to promote participation.¹⁵ As discussed in Chapter 3, the 'state' is widely constructed in donor discourses as a benign administrative body, enabling decentralisation to be regarded as an apolitical activity offering more effective delivery of services. The 1999 *State of the World's Children* epitomises this position, and highlights some of the currently dominant ideas about the potential of decentralisation, specifically in the context of education (UNICEF 1999: 68-70). It recognises that central control may be desirable and more efficient in areas such as textbook production, in order to ensure that "children in all parts of the country have access to quality material and the material does not promote ethnic hatred". But it goes on to stress the need to give communities greater local autonomy if schools are to be responsive to local needs and to improve quality.¹⁶

In this characterisation, decentralisation is seen in relation to wider commitments to international development goals, an approach sanctioned and supported by agencies as a framework for the more effective delivery of services. Decentralisation has become a project which can be supported and initiated by external donor agencies: UNDP and DANIDA played influential roles supporting the introduction of the Local Self Governance Act in Nepal, and DFID, GTZ and other bilateral agencies make up a raft of other initiatives designed at 'enabling the state' and promoting a strengthened role for line agencies and local government.¹⁷ The paradox of this promotion of decentralisation and participation as a top-down global 'good' receives little attention in the dominant discourse. Decentralisation is heralded as a 'new' approach that will ensure improved delivery of broader development goods as well as being a desirable end in itself. The multiple attempts at decentralisation in Nepal over the last 50 years are rarely considered, except as background or context to the

¹⁵ During the latter half of the 1990s, a number of donor-led initiatives aimed at promoting decentralisation were instigated in Nepal and a new Act of Parliament, the Local Self Governance Act prepared, debated and eventually passed in 1999. The extent to which the preparation of this Act was internally or externally driven is a contentious issue. While no one is prepared to admit that there was any sense of compulsion for the government to prepare such a law, in discussions with the various donors there was a strong sense of donor influence in the High Level Committee designated to prepare the document. There also seemed to be an element of competition between the donors in terms of who had most influence and who had been instrumental in instigating the reform.

¹⁶ Decentralisation is seen as a desirable option, despite the fact that it will inevitably be more expensive, due to the additional training, resources and staff required. As the report states, "decentralisation should be selected not because it is the cheapest option, but the best, and it strengthens the State's commitment to and ability to achieve Education For All" (UNICEF 1999: 68).

¹⁷ The implications of the potential tensions between local government bodies and line agencies of central government Ministries is given little consideration.

latest 'best' practice and little thought is given to the impact this history of thwarted attempts to shift the locus of power away from Kathmandu may have on the perceptions of individuals and groups within Nepal.¹⁸

A frequently voiced opinion among officials in Nepal, and indeed more widely, is that processes of so-called decentralisation often, in fact, serve to strengthen the power of the central state. Analysing trends over the last 50 years, Shrestha has referred to the current situation as a one of "decentralisation with creeping centralisation", emphasising both the rhetorical shifts and the rather stealthy way in which central power is maintained (T.N. Shrestha 1999, 1996).¹⁹ As Harper and Tarnowski (2000) note in their discussion of the health and community forestry sectors in Nepal, decentralisation in this context involves:

... the formation of quasi-agreements by local people, groups, patients, with the government sectors, the formation of committees, holding regular meetings and particularly strict reporting and recording formalities. Paradoxically, ... despite enunciatory claims to decentralisation, these programmes are producing an entire apparatus through which the state is able to govern its people, its health and management of resources in an increasingly centralised manner (Harper and Tarnowski 2000: 1).

Clearly, while donors and national governments may make pronouncements about improving participation and promoting decentralisation, the everyday practices of project implementation and the daily activities of administrative and political bodies at all levels may actually be strengthening the position and power of 'the state', through the extension of the apparatus and institutions of the central authorities further into the lives of its citizens. The creation of village level committees as arms of central government Ministries, the need to register births and marriages, the rationing of kerosene, and so on ensure that much of the individual's day-to-day life is encompassed by the state. Such issues must be borne in mind during the following discussion of the promotion of greater participation in education

¹⁸ There was a tendency for officials to be rather circumspect about the latest initiatives, preferring to wait and see results rather than express opinions on the basis of policy pronouncement alone. A Nepali proverb cited on a number of occasions in response to questions about the Local Self Governance Act highlights this apprehension — 'an elephant has two sets of teeth, one large set for show and another, smaller set that it uses for eating'. The new Act is, one Ministry official told me, the equivalent of the elephant's tusks — on show to the outside and looking quite impressive. The 'bite' that it would have, however, was very likely to be less ferocious than external appearances might suggest (f/n: 3/10/00). Another former BPEP official was very firm in his belief that 'your research will conclude that decentralisation is not really taking place in Nepal (f/n: 23/3/00), again emphasising the perception of a considerable gulf between pronouncement and practice.

¹⁹ It must be stressed that decentralisation is not a new phenomenon, despite its current presentation as the new best framework for action. More historical perspectives on attempts at decentralisation are found in Bienen *et al* (1990), Dahal (1994), Poudyal (1991) in relation to Nepal. In a more general context of decentralisation and development, Conyers (1984) provides an overview.

planning through the initiation of District Education Planning as a central component of Nepal's Basic and Primary Education Programme.

BPEP II: Promoting Participation through Decentralisation?

Within the BPEP II documentation the idea of participation is conceptualised along spatial lines, with geographical location and physical distance from the 'centre' of decision-making in Kathmandu the key markers of relative inclusion in planning processes. As the *DEP Formulation Manual 2056* explains:

The project decided at the central level will not incorporate local needs and requirements. Every district will have its own features concerning geographical setting, cultural framework and economic composition and educational status, and as such the local needs as well as priority sector of the project will be diverse in accordance to the features thereof. By involving local related persons in formulating, implementing follow-up and evaluation of the education plan and by enhancing the sense of responsibility and ownership among the public concerning the educational plan, based on the concept of participatory planning and partnership management and decentralised governance system, the Education Plan is an accepted and valid document for overall educational development of the district (DOE 1999).

The district is thus envisaged as the key site for the planning and implementation of BPEP components, with District Education Planning offering a more decentred perspective on the needs of schools and the education administration that could then guide the allocation of resources from the centre. With the assessment of needs and priorities considered the domain of the individual districts, the Department of Education in Kathmandu is given the role of coordination, collating the 75 DEPs and consulting with donors and other government bodies such as the National Planning Commission.²⁰

Donor Visions of Decentralisation

Decentralised planning is constructed in the PIP as a multi-layered activity based around two main exercises, the preparation of School Improvement Plans (SIPs) and District Education Plans (MOE 2000a, b, c).²¹ The former involves bottom-up planning, with schools

²⁰ Significantly, the BPE/DU is presented in the PIP as the centre level body responsible for assessing the DEPs, with plans being submitted to the Primary Education Division of the Department of Education and then passed on to the Unit for approval. However, a shift in approach led to the rapid disbanding of the unit and the Department of Education was allocated this responsibility.

²¹ In addition, the creation of Village Education Committees is proposed, consisting of representatives of the VDCs, SMCs, local NGOs, headmasters, schools and Resource People. Its role would be to "conduct enrolment drives, participate in micro-planning and school mapping exercises, ensure maintenance / supervise primary schools and NFE and ECD centers, monitor teacher and student attendance, mobilize local resources, review and follow up annual programs and create a supportive

conducting “participatory / micro-planning exercises”, and the data collected used to prepare a plan of action for physical and academic upgrading (MOE 1999: xv).²² District planning is directed by the District Education Office (DEO) and the Resource People, requiring the preparation of a District Education Plan using available secondary information and “limited participatory exercises” (MOE 1999: xv). While the main responsibility for preparing the document lies with the DEO team, the process as envisaged in the PIP should involve consultation with local bodies such as the School Management Committee (SMC), local NGOs and the district offices of other line agencies. Promoting such partnership is possible as the different agencies are regarded as sharing a common commitment to the “goals of universal access, universal retention, improving learning achievement and building local capacity” (*ibid.* : xvi-xvii).

According to the PIP formulation, the introduction of district level planning was to proceed in a phase-wise manner, with 12 plans prepared in 1998/99 for funding in the following fiscal year and a further 23 plans developed in 1999/2000 (MOE 1999: 40-41). By autumn 1999 this had been amended, with all districts engaging in some form of planning to enable district-wise funding countrywide in the following financial year. Three different levels of DEP — comprehensive planning, district education planning, and basic planning — were devised, with districts allocated to bands depending on their perceived preparedness for the initiative.²³ During implementation, these distinctions became less significant and, by the presentation and evaluation stage, these categories had become largely obsolete. The different types of plan were indistinguishable and treated identically by officials at the centre. Similarly, the focus on School Improvement Plans also became more limited during the implementation process, and there was little discussion of this at any level during the first period of District Education Plan development.

This ‘textbook’ model of how to make BPEP more participatory masks considerable tensions surrounding the defining and implementing of the DEP exercise, with differences of definition and emphasis clearly visible between groups involved in BPEP at the centre level,

atmosphere for the implementation of the BPE activities and programs” (MOE 1999: xvi). However, there is no clear indication in the PIP of how this Village Education Plan will relate to, or feed into, either the School Improvement Plans or the District Education Plan.

²² Specifically, a three- day planning workshop is to be conducted, with parents, teachers and community members meeting to discuss issues and prepare the SIP. The School Management Committee is expected to give final approval before the SIP is submitted to the DEO, via the Resource Person.

²³ Dhankuta was placed in the ‘district education planning’ category. Note that in practice the process in all districts was referred to as District Education Planning.

both donor and government. Despite strong rhetorical interest in the promotion of partnership and sector-wide approaches, differences of opinion exist among the donor community and inequalities remain rife in terms of their relative strength of voice and ability to influence the direction of the programme. The tension and debate at the global level over the issue of participation led to the emergence of multiple interpretations and diverging priorities in the context of the country programme.

A discussion with two Nepali academics involved in the PIP preparation process highlighted how changes within donor organisations impacted on the speed with which the move to decentralised planning was introduced (f/n:9/5/01). They described how earlier drafts of the PIP more closely reflected the Master Plan's (Master Plan Team 1997) approach to decentralisation, seeing it as a gradual process of shifting the site of decision-making power. The 1998 World Bank Pre-Appraisal Mission document supports this perception. It states that all donors:

... recognize that decentralization of planning and implementation responsibility to the district level, and the introduction of a bottom-up participatory process must be done gradually and incorporate the lessons from experience that will be accumulated during implementation (World Bank 1998: 15).

However, with a shift in staff and the introduction of new foreign consultants by some of the agencies, the interest in decentralisation was heightened with individual consultants expressing particular commitments to such an approach. By the preparation of the PIP in February 1999, 12 DEPs had been requested for review by March / April 1999 and the production of DEPs and School Improvement Plans had become a central pillar of the programme.²⁴

²⁴ This is reinforced through an examination of Aide Memoires produced at the various joint donor missions, with district planning being a central focus of discussion at the two 1999 meetings and the first 2000 meeting. By November 2000, however, the focus on DEPs was shifting and moves introduced to relegate it to a 'pilot' exercise, a move confirmed in the April 2001 Aide Memoire. This more rapid introduction of the DEP process was primarily pushed by the World Bank and the European Union. Following the November 1999 Mission, at which it was observed that there was no existing capacity for district planning in Nepal, they insisted the government produced Plans for all districts by January 2000. Their preparation within this six week period became a precondition for the release of funds. In contrast, DANIDA was regarded by Nepali officials as taking a more cautious approach to the process and "often tried to raise the flag" when other donors showed signs of pushing ahead with institutional restructuring. In particular, DANIDA voiced reservations about the speed at BPE/DU was disbanded, the establishment of the Department of Education and the introduction of country-wide district planning (f/n: 9/5/01).

There was widespread recognition within Nepal of the folly of introducing this new operating style so rapidly at both the centre and district levels. District officials stressed that they had been given too little time to complete the activities necessary to ensure the preparation of a satisfactory plan (f/n: 23/2/00). At the central level, an official warned that the donors would spend the next year discussing district planning, in order to try to turn the hastily-implemented approach into something more workable (f/n: 23/3/00). Following the initial process of implementation of the DEP initiative, this scattered criticism of the approach became a more widespread recognition that the concept had been pushed too quickly and that it had even been, to cite one donor consultant, "a disaster" (f/n: 9/4/01). In response, there was a move away from the view of this component as central to the broader programme during the latter half of 2000, with the scope of district planning down-sized and focus placed on its role as a pilot initiative. In addition, the distinction between different types of Plan re-emerged, as did an interest in expanding the capacity of schools to deal with the preparation of School Improvement Plans.

There are also notable differences between various parties involved in the process of DEP preparation over the nature of decentralisation and the scope that the new approach should have. In particular there is a clear distinction between those who focused on administrative decentralisation (the devolving of responsibilities from the centre to district level line agencies) and those who viewed the change as an opportunity to transfer power to other political bodies, particularly through the strengthening of District and Village Development Committees.²⁵ The lack of clarity over definitions of decentralisation is in many respects symptomatic of broader tensions between donor policies at the global level. District Planning was particularly strongly pushed by two of the core donors, the World Bank and the European Union (World Bank 1998: 15), who are both also involved in the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in India. As one donor consultant explained, there are two different perspectives taken by the donors: the EU and World Bank, drawing on their

²⁵ For example, the Federation of District Development Committees, an increasingly powerful lobbying force, emphasises that the new Local Self Governance Act gives greater power to district and village level government. DANIDA appear to support this view in relation to their work through the DASU initiative aimed at strengthening local authorities and associations (f/n: 28/9/99). However, the education administration, both centrally and at district level, insist that the powers given to them in the education regulations remain pre-eminent. This debate became particularly salient in the district context over the issue of who appoints School Management Committee (SMC) members. The local government bodies claim that they have the power under the LSGA, whereas the DEO insists that the power remains with them. In a number of schools in the study district this caused considerable confusion, and led to the creation of two SMCs, representing opposing political parties. In one school, where there was a teaching vacancy, the two Committees could not agree on a suitable

experience of India's District Primary Education Project, have a more administrative view of decentralisation, whereas DANIDA has a more politically-focused view which emphasises increasing "ordinary people's" participation in decision-making²⁶ (f/n: 9/4/01). Tensions between donors therefore extend beyond the remit of the particular project, to discussions of each agency's 'comparative advantage' and global experience in the field.

In addition to the broader context of donor development policies, consideration must also be given to the debates about decentralisation that are taking place within the external support agencies themselves. For the World Bank, and to a lesser extent the EU, internal debates about institutional practice focus primarily on making the bureaucracy more efficient and the deconcentration of power and decision-making capacity to offices beyond the central level institution.²⁷ For bilateral donors the national context of decentralisation debates is somewhat different. Attention is more often focused on the political dynamics of devolving power to sub-national bodies. In the context of greater interest among donor countries in 'policy coherence' across the work of national government departments, this perspective on in-country centre-local relations is increasingly likely to influence the approaches to decentralisation that are sanctioned through aid initiatives. This linkage between attempts at decentralisation in donor countries and the interest in pushing the concept in BPEP was made by a number of donor representatives. Significantly, they were also quick to acknowledge (in hindsight) that decentralisation debates have been under discussion for a long time in their home countries and policies are still not being implemented effectively, so it had perhaps been overly optimistic to think the move could be made in a year in Nepal.

Interpreting District Education Planning: Views From the District

Working among the education elite of policy-makers and donors in Kathmandu and reading the current literature being produced on education in Nepal, one gets the impression that the Basic and Primary Education Programme is the most significant influence on schooling. Indeed, the large amount of money involved in the initiative, coupled with the complexity of its aims and structures, has led to its becoming a, if not the, major force driving changes such as the restructuring of the Ministry of Education and the Department of Education. But on

candidate to take up the post, so the school had to manage with only two teachers for five classes for several months (f/n: 8/5/00). See Shrestha (2000) for an account of similar processes in Lalitpur.

²⁶ Significantly, the two Nepali consultants who were contracted by the Bank to produce the BPEP Program Implementation Plan (PIP) were sent on a 'study trip' to southern India as part of the preparation for writing the PIP.

²⁷ In the case of the Bank this often means 'decentralising' power to other offices in Washington D.C., rather than down to in-country missions.

leaving the Kathmandu Valley it rapidly becomes clear that BPEP is just one input among many at the district and school level. Thus its impact and influence has to be viewed in the context of the webs of divergent interests that ensure that the manner in which the DEP process is interpreted and implemented at the district and school level has a somewhat different form from that envisaged in the planning documents.

DEP and Connections with ‘Development’

Perhaps the most striking aspect of how the DEP process has been taken up and implemented in the district is the highly varied and conflicting interpretations of the rationale behind the exercise. The rhetoric generated in Kathmandu focuses on the need for increased participation in education planning and programme implementation and this call for a shift in the direction of communication from “top-to-bottom” to “bottom-to-top” has clearly reached the district offices, and even schools. Indeed, the phrases were often used during interviews to mark the central difference between BPEP I and BPEP II.²⁸ How the relationship between ‘top’ and ‘bottom’ was conceptualised by various individuals and groups within the education administration, however, challenges the idea of a single vision of the BPEP initiative or shared interests in schooling reform. Further, the way different layers of the administrative and political state — District Education Officials, teachers, District and Village Development Committee members — articulate their role in the DEP process highlights the need to disaggregate the concept of ‘the state’ and recognise the tensions and conflicts between the various layers. Consideration must, therefore, be given to the views that officials located at various levels have of their relationship with the education administration and the BPEP initiative as such relations have a significant impact on how reform initiatives such as District Education Planning are engaged with.

For example, the shift in power from the central Ministry to the district and school level was not interpreted by district officials as a new relationship with the Kathmandu authorities, but was widely viewed as the establishment of a stronger connection between the donors and district and sub-district groups. The awareness of donor involvement in the BPEP initiative was very high, with DEO staff aware of the funding mechanisms employed by donors and the percentage of funding each agency was contributing.²⁹ Awareness of the role of

²⁸ Similar to the use of terminology such as ‘project’ and ‘programme’, these phrases were only ever used in English. The term for decentralisation — *bikendrakaran* — was more commonly used in Nepali, highlighting that this was a concept which had a longer history within Nepali administration, at least in rhetoric if not in practice.

²⁹ Indeed, an accountant at the DEO informed me he had to complete forms which divided up district expenditure into the separate percentage for each donor (f/n: 7/11/00).

DANIDA was particularly strong in Dhankuta. Teachers from a number of schools enquired if Denmark was a “rich country” and if it had “more money than Britain?” as it was able to give so much support to education in Nepal. The presence of two Danish volunteers who provided special education training to schools in the Eastern Region compounded such perceptions of Denmark and reinforced the concept of its role as external ‘provider’ to Nepal’s education. The pervasiveness of this perception was striking: in one school, where a particular problem of teachers arriving late for class had arisen, the Head-Sir informed me that such problems would not happen in other countries: “in Denmark and in Saudi Arabia teachers are given jeeps if they have to travel far to school” (f/n: 16/4/00).³⁰

Visions of the ‘external’ strongly influenced how people viewed their own position and how their relative influence could be enhanced. Thus the shift to a district planning approach was frequently articulated as a move made by donors to increase their connection with lower levels of the administration. Increased contact with those from outside was viewed as the main route through which people at the school and district level could have their voices heard, since a connection with donors potentially enhanced the status of the district and sub-district authorities vis-à-vis higher levels of the administration. One Head-Sir explained the interest in district planning as follows:

Donors are giving money, everyone knows that, but it is not coming here [to the school]. Now the donors want to know from the bottom-up what the situation is. They ask, ‘What do you need?’ So now the schools are hoping for something to happen and will ask why things are not happening. Donors want to hear what is happening from the bottom. But the government is also involved and has to implement things, but the donors hope that things will work now from the bottom-up (f/n: 21/4/00).

Here, the rhetoric of “bottom-to-top” is utilised but takes on a very particular meaning, the strengthening of the relationship between the school and the donor, a move which he hopes will open up a new channel of influence and, ultimately, increase the resources flowing to the ‘bottom’.

Similarly, officials in the DEO placed themselves at the centre of the planning process, and considered that a greater connection with the donors would help counter influences currently limiting their ability to work effectively, notably political interference in education decision-making. As one official noted:

³⁰ The awareness of Saudi Arabia as a wealthy country is due to the large number of community members, particularly (but not exclusively) men, who have travelled to the Arab states to work.

People are still looking out for their own parties and there is pressure to give programmes to certain VDCs for political reasons. Now the Plan is written, people cannot put pressure to get more or to change the provision. If there are 10 programmes going to one VDC then they cannot then ask for more. If the school says there are 52 students, so they need one classroom, then they can't ask for more. Now the Plan is finished the work of the DEO will be easy! Donors think that the DEO office should not be given pressure from political interests (f/n: 23/2/00).

There was also an assumption that getting information to the donors would be the most effective mechanism through which to influence change and improve working conditions; indeed, I was frequently asked to pass on requests to people in Kathmandu. In addition, there was a strong perception that the donors were the main audience for the District Plans, and it was feedback from them which was considered most important. The Project Coordinator in Dhankuta, for example, expressed concern that he "didn't know what indicators or criteria the donors are using to judge plans or what the donors want or expect", so it was difficult to know what to include in the Plan (f/n: 8/5/00).³¹

The donors were regarded in many respects as 'supervisors', checking that work was being conducted effectively at all levels of the administration, and were considered by district and school staff alike as their allies in a struggle against the power of the central authorities. Following the decision in spring 2000 that the completed DEPs could not provide a realistic basis for the following year's Budget, budget ceilings for each component and for each district were set centrally and revised documents were sent to the districts to be stamped and returned. This was viewed by District officials as an attempt to undermine the District's authority, contrary to the donors' wishes. As one official stressed:

What has gone to the donors is not the district's priority, but the NPC's priorities. It's not a bottom-up approach at all. It's been done by the NPC and the Department of Education, but the donors think that it is coming from the bottom (f/n: 8/5/00).

Accompanying the interest in establishing a stronger link with the donors is thus a concern that the donors themselves could be duped by the central administration, and that this in turn would reflect badly on the district.

³¹ Similarly, officials were interested in feedback from donors on the completed Plan. A Danish student who briefly visited the DEO was quizzed about his views, as officials believed he was a representative of DANIDA. The Project Co-ordinator later expressed great disappointment that the only comment had been that it "contained a lot of data".

Thus, from the district level there is a very clear sense that BPEP remains a donor-led initiative. Indeed the new approach is interpreted by the Project Coordinator as giving even greater power to the individual donors. “Now it’s basket funding, so the whole plan can be blocked by one donor. Before, if one donor was dissatisfied, then only one component would be affected. Now the entire programme will be impacted on” (f/n: 8/5/00). This does not, of course, mean that donors were uncritically revered by district level officials; indeed officials were often very disparaging of external intervention. Rather, the various aspects of the programme were used strategically to advance particular positions. While greater equality between government and donors is stressed in the BPEP II documentation, the differences between them are continually highlighted and played on as a means of securing greater influence for the district office or school staff. The DEP process was thus regarded as offering an alternative route through which to secure benefits, a way of circumventing existing barriers to advancement through emphasising new connections with ‘development’, in the form of the external donors.

However, as the scene which began this chapter depicts, over the course of the implementation of the DEP initiative, the initial enthusiasm turned to disillusionment. A degree of resignation developed that the process remained a hierarchical one, with little power or responsibility transferred to the sub-national layers of the administration. District planning came to be seen as another demand issued from the centre — part of the wider exercise of control and surveillance by the central authorities over the lower layers of the administration. To understand the decline in interest, it is necessary to explore how the DEP process was taken up and implemented in a particular context.

From Bottom-to-Top? District Planning in Context

Turning to the actual process of collecting and collating the necessary information for the DEP, it is striking that the differentials of influence and the relative ‘voice’ of individuals and groups were reinforced through the exercise, as opposed to the new approach offering avenues through which previously under-represented groups could be heard. In practice the process remained embedded in relationships of influence and privileged communication, caught up in existing conflicts over control of resources and the relative status of institutions and individuals. An exploration of how District Education Planning was experienced at the school and district level will therefore highlight the highly selective form of participation that the initiative generated, both in terms of the people involved and the extent to which they could influence the direction of the process. The initiative was not introduced into a

vacuum, but became caught up in webs of cross-cutting and competing interests. It was used as a further arena in which groups sought to exert their authority and influence. Turning first to the role of District Education Office staff in the DEP process, this sense of selective opportunities for participation is further reinforced. Activities were largely directed from the centre, with a highly partial inclusion of district officials and other stakeholders into the decision-making process.

Selective Participation in the DEP Process at the District Level

The instruction to initiate District Education Plans came from Kathmandu, in response to the conditions laid down by donors prior to the commencement of BPEP II. It was communicated in an authoritative manner to the districts through Kathmandu and regionally-based training sessions and written instructions. A weekend training session was arranged in Kathmandu for Project Coordinators and District Education Officers, who were then expected to provide guidance to Resource People before data collection commenced. The concept of 'training' here is crucial, as it was utilised not as a forum for discussion or the building up of skills, but rather the direct transfer of instructions about what should be done. At the Kathmandu event, I was told, the 'training' was given in the form of a lecture by a Nepali educationist closely associated with BPEP, who stood in front of the assembled group and described the rationale of the DEP and the information that districts should gather in order to secure funding. Significantly, few questions were raised about the process. Participants interpreted the event as the transmission of instructions rather than a forum in which they could ask questions or influence the process (f/n:10/99).³² Events such as this reinforce the perception that the DEP initiative is being driven 'from the top' and that the visible promotion of participation is required in order to meet donor demands.

In Dhankuta, the process was run by the Project Coordinator, with information transferred to the Resource People during a two-day workshop held in the DEO. The focus was on understanding the information received from Kathmandu and the mood was largely one of concern at the amount of work and "lack of training" provided (f/n: 31/10/99). The communication of instructions through the administrative pyramid seems to be of only limited value. RPs did not consider that they had been properly 'trained' unless they had themselves attended meetings with people considered to be experts. The transfer of

³² Later meetings held in each Region to give feedback on the Plans that had been prepared were described in similar ways. Again, communication was described as predominantly one-way, with Ministry and donor representatives taking the role of bearers of information, giving the 'assessment'

information via the PC was not considered sufficient to provide the RPs with the requisite skills.³³ However, despite this perception that they were not prepared to conduct all the required components of the process, attempts were made by the district staff to perform the various steps of the data collection and Plan preparation process as advocated by officials in Kathmandu. Questionnaires were issued to schools, the District Education Committee convened and trips made to Kathmandu to collect population data from the Central Bureau of Statistics.³⁴

The issuing of instructions from Kathmandu is accompanied by a strong sense of compulsion that districts deliver the required information back to the centre, with the successful completion of the process a prerequisite both for the release of funds and the personal advancement of individual officials.³⁵ This fairly extractive relationship is, in the context of the DEP, couched in the rhetoric of participation, yet the relative position of each of the layers remains unaffected. The necessity of pleasing those above in order to secure a desirable transfer or promotion is clearly understood by officials at all levels. In the study district, the DEO himself was actively seeking a transfer to Kathmandu so he was particularly concerned about creating a good impression of the educational improvements made in the district.³⁶ Bista's study as part of the Institutional Analysis highlights a similar situation: the district officials he interviewed regarded their position as one of subordination to the whims of those at the centre level. As one noted, "those who make it to the top ... are the most fortunate ones. They happen to suffer from a superiority complex and we are treated as their subordinates who should be available to carry out their instructions". Others noted that they had little voice in the system — "We are just attendants waiting to be told what we should be doing", "We simply carry out someone else's agenda, we don't have our own plan and mission" (Bista 2000: 66). Indeed, the DEO office has been described as

of the documents and informing officials of the changes required to ensure that the revised DEPs were within the budget established for each component of the programme.

³³ The sense that such training had to come from the donors was emphasised by the numerous requests directed at me to "tell the donors we need more training".

³⁴ During the first period of planning, the PC travelled to Kathmandu to get copies of the population statistics for the district from the 1991 census. This was used as the basis for their calculations, although officials did make their "own estimates" of the changes in the intervening nine years.

³⁵ Thus information relating to the DEP passes from the school, by way of the RP, to the DEO, where it is compiled and then passed on to the Department of Education, where approval is then sought from a number of sources including the donors and the National Planning Commission.

³⁶ A clear tension exists in the creation of district plans. On the one hand it is in the interests of schools and districts to give the impression of poor performance in order to secure additional resources under the formulas prescribed in BPEP. On the other, however, to secure the favour of those further up the hierarchy there is interest in showing good educational improvement — as well, of course, as political allegiance to one's superiors.

functioning “as an ‘extension of the central department’, with instructions coming directly from the centre” (*ibid.*: 65); the chain of communication remains predominantly uni-directional. Instructions issued from the centre must be complied with by the district — a position further reinforced through the DEP process.

Similarly, the relationship between the DEO and the schools remains fairly hierarchical, with the ability of those seen as lower in the hierarchy to influence the course of DEO practice very limited. Indeed, barriers to participation were frequently constructed and attempts to try to negotiate with the administration actively blocked. On numerous occasions during my visits to the DEO, teachers would come to the office to request assistance with specific problems, only to be dismissed almost immediately by the District Education Officer or even completely ignored. One female teacher who had travelled from one of the more remote VDCs in the district to ask if she could attend a training course was not even able to make her request directly to the DEO before being dismissed by a group of RPs. Another teacher who tried to put his case for a transfer to the District Education Officer was bluntly ignored, with tea given to everyone else in the room and no response given to him at all. Thus, while the rhetoric of District Education Planning emphasises increased opportunities for schools and communities to influence decision-making processes, the implementation of this in practice has to be understood in light of existing barriers to those voices being heard and existing patterns of communication and influence.

This authoritative position of officials vis-à-vis those who visit the office is not static or fixed, but is continually reinforced through the mundane daily activities and practices of the office. The physical set-up of the office, for example, helps create and reinforce a differential in status between visitors, district officials and the DEO himself. Low seats were set out around three walls of the room. A large desk and higher chair is placed ceremoniously facing the rest of the room, complete with telephone, ensuring the DEO is the gatekeeper of any communication into, or out from, the office. This layout required visitors to enter a room in which groups of people were clustered around talking to each other, with no staff enquiring about the reason for the visit. The DEO himself would continue writing or talking to other officials, acknowledging the newcomer in his own time (and occasionally not at all), gestures which reinforce the idea that he is doing the visitor a great favour by even recognising their presence. Other officials in the District Education Office used similar practices to establish their position in relation to the teachers and students who had business to conduct in the office. They often made the visitor wait for long periods before even the

most straightforward task was completed or found minor faults which required that they come back another day or go first to another office. In one example, a teacher was sent repeatedly to the nearby shop to purchase the items necessary for his application to be processed — a cardboard folder, then some glue and finally a pen. Such small acts serve to emphasise the unequal power between the teacher and the official, with the latter able to block requests or postpone the processing of applications by finding numerous faults with how any procedure has been dealt with.

Of course, power is also exercised over the DEO staff, predominantly through political influence and connections with central level authorities or politicians. Head teachers with political influence through their union and party affiliations or with a direct link to officials in Kathmandu are generally more able to influence the decisions taken by the DEO. For example, the husband of one school's head teacher was the Principal of the local university campus and an influential figure both in politics and in the education establishment. Thus the head teacher was able to negotiate for extra resources and teachers to be assigned to the school. Similarly, the groups which were able to successfully lobby for inclusion in the DEP plans, such as an NGO wishing to provide early childhood classes in a number of schools, had direct personal connections with district officials. The reception that individuals receive on entering the office is thus highly partial, dependent on the connections which the person can show with someone in authority in the office.

There are also clear boundaries defining the roles of people within the office and significant differentials in terms of authority and status. These, too, impacted on the form of participation in the DEP processes. The District Education Officer is at the apex of power within the office, with accountability for decisions made in the district considered to lie entirely with him. He is, as a former DEO noted, "wholesale responsible":

Even though there are other Section Officers in the office, if the people phone or go to the DEO when he is not there, then they will be told that the 'DEO is not here' so nothing can be done. Subordinate officers are not doing anything and the responsibility falls to the DEO alone (f/n: 10/4/00).

However, while the DEO may be ultimately responsible, this does not mean that he does all the work. Indeed he appeared to be so involved in the daily mediation of problems related to schooling that he was not able to give much thought to strategic planning. Certainly, in the case of the DEP preparation and in relation to much of the other BPEP-related work, Project Co-ordinator and the DEO's Administrative Assistant actually organised the relevant

meetings, collated the data and wrote the report. This division between the politically-oriented work of the DEO and the more administrative role played by the PC significantly marked out their relative status and their spheres of influence, positions reinforced through the mundane daily activities of the office.

The differential between the PC and the DEO was emphasised, for example, during a discussion between the Project Coordinator and a number of Resource People. When the PC rang a bell to gain the attention of the *peon*, only a very quiet shrill sound was heard. A few minutes later the DEO rang the bell in his office, at the other end of the corridor, and electronic 'bird song' sound could be heard throughout the building. The PC laughed, "small person, small noise. Big person, big noise" (f/n: 23/2/00). Hierarchical relationships between other staff members found similar expression in daily activities. The Administrative Assistant, with his close relationship with the DEO, had considerable authority and other officials kept their distance from him. On one occasion a large group of Section Officers and RPs gathered in an office to drink tea and chat. Despite the crowd, no one sat in the seat at the administrative officer's desk, even though he did not actually appear in the room at all that morning: a woman visiting from the Regional Office who walked over to it was quickly chastised by the DEO staff. The differing status and roles of staff within the DEO were thus continually reinforced through the multiple, mundane daily activities in the office.

Networks beyond those highlighted in organisational charts and in the DEP process envisaged in the plans developed in Kathmandu also significantly impact on relationships between DEO officials and on how closely individuals were involved in the preparation of the district's Plan. Again political networks played an important role, influencing how much different RPs helped each other and the Project Co-ordinator. This was particularly evident following a shift in personnel at the DEO. The PC who had prepared the original Plan was transferred to another district and a more politically engaged, and personally less popular, replacement was drafted in. During the initial stages of planning, under the direction of the original PC, a large number of RPs were involved in the process. RPs gathered in the Project Co-ordinator's office to discuss procedures and to try to make sense of the instructions directed at them from the central authorities. Considerable enthusiasm and interest in the initiative was expressed, notably through the continual reference to the DEP as 'our Plan' and to the need to impress the donors by producing a quality piece of work. The old PC departed at the same time as the Plan had to be reviewed and spending proposals amended to

ensure that figures were more in line with the central budgets. While disillusionment with the process and the disappointment that the new approach had not delivered what it had promised played a considerable role in dampening enthusiasm for the revision process, the staff change clearly made many people who were previously active in decision-making feel marginalised. A number of RPs, who had previously done much of their work in the PCs office and had discussed their work with him, sat in an adjacent office while the new PC and those RPs who now found themselves in a favoured position worked alongside their superior. There was a strong political element to this. Those who found themselves sidelined were all fairly active supporters of leftist parties, while the new PC was involved with the ruling Congress Party. This was usually only openly expressed in terms of the personalities of the two PCs, however. One RP, for example, noted that the former Co-ordinator had been a “good person”, whereas the new arrival was “very different” (f/n: 22/2/00).

Gender also influenced access to decision-making to a certain extent, although with only one female RP in the district it is difficult to draw any conclusion other than that women are very significantly underrepresented throughout the education administration.³⁷ Looking at the system more broadly, the Institutional Analysis report on the education administration shows that only 5% of the Gazetted officials in the Ministry are female and that they are overwhelmingly situated in the lower levels of the hierarchy (Bista 2000: 97). Even within the teaching cadre, a work force which is becoming increasingly feminised in many countries, only 19% are women, despite efforts during BPEP I to increase this figure (*ibid.*: 96). In Dhankuta, it is striking that women who have relatively influential positions within the education administration — notably the School Supervisor and a secondary school head teacher who was also a member of the District Education Committee — had influential, politically-active husbands (the former’s husband was the MP for the area, the latter’s spouse was Principal of a local campus). Both women had also been educated to degree level. Thus their connection with political networks allowed them to be more vocal and influential and, indeed, may well have been a factor in their attaining positions of authority.

The preparation of the DEP was not envisaged as a task simply for the education office officials to complete, but required the involvement and approval of the District Education

³⁷ Only three women are employed in the DEO, one female School Supervisor / RP, a secretary and a woman who made and served tea.

Committee (DEC) and the District Development Committee.³⁸ The 15-member DEC included the Chief District Officer, the DDC President and a number of head teachers. It was convened at the start of the planning process and then again when the Plan had been prepared, ostensibly to advise and provide additional inputs to the discussion from a cross-sectoral perspective. However, the Education Office staff felt that the DEC did not contribute much, simply “giving the OK” to allow it to be sent to Kathmandu (f/n: 8/5/00). A member of the DEC, a school head teacher, acknowledged this lack of enthusiasm for the process, explaining that while the committee held the required meetings, they were aware that there was unlikely to be any response to their suggestions. They believed that “we have no hope. Planning is always the same. What we fill in on the form is not going to happen” (f/n: 5/5/00).

The cooperation of the District Development Committee was also required, as the National Planning Commission had requested a letter from the DDC confirming their support for the Plan be sent to Kathmandu along with the final draft of the DEP. This initially caused some concern, as the DDC is controlled by the Leftist opposition party, the CPN-UML, not the Congress party who control the central parliament, and there were fears that this would lead to difficulties. However, as the Project Co-ordinator explained, in practice there were no significant problems in Dhankuta:

Here it wasn't an issue that the DDC is UML-led and the central government is Congress as all the parties were involved in the advisory group. For example, we needed a letter from the DDC to send to the Kathmandu and we were able to get it in one day. Preparing the DEP was not seen as a party issue but as a community plan. The emphasis on community is used to get maximum involvement. So it was seen as from the district and not as a political document. It's a Congress plan for improvement, but it's the UML who have to implement it in the district and VDCs, so both groups had an interest in the Plan. Village

³⁸ Significantly, the Regional Educational Directorate was only minimally involved in the DEP process, given little consideration by either the central or district level. Those working in the RED also recognise their relative impotence and lack of direct engagement in the decision-making process but, from a personal perspective, this is often considered an advantage. Work in the RED is, as one officer noted, good ‘for a rest’ compared with the work environment in the DEO where there is lots of tension. A Section Officer from the RED had been invited to be a member of the district's DEP Advisory Committee, and had attended one meeting in that capacity. However, despite the RED and DEO buildings being next door to each, there appeared to be no on-going contact between the different offices. During the process of revising the DEP in autumn 2000, the appointed RED officer was not invited to any meetings, although he had received copies of all the Plans prepared by districts in the region (f/n: 16/10/00). This growing irrelevance and lack of role for those working within the RED was starkly highlighted when, during a tour of the office block, I was shown the ‘library’, a room with 2 large tables, a number of chairs and a huge pile of newspapers. My guide told me that they now subscribed to 25 different newspapers instead of the four that were originally purchased, so that they now have enough to read during the day (f/n: 10/4/00).

Education Committees are going to be established under the Plan and, as all parties are to be represented in such committees, there should not be any problems associated with party differences and they should be able to focus on the interests of the schools (f/n: 23/2/00).

This interpretation of events, however, puts a rather positive ‘gloss’ on the relationship, with DDC and Municipality officials giving a slightly different view. The DDC regarded itself as the main body responsible for the plans made by line ministries, and even by donors, for projects in the district.³⁹ The potential for conflicts of interest between the bodies is recognised by the DDC officials, who highlighted cases where differences of opinion had already emerged, such as over the selection of the Chairs of School Management Committees (f/n: 14/4/00).⁴⁰ The Municipality officials simply said that the DEO had not co-ordinated their planning with that of the Municipality in any way. The co-ordination of central and local government interests and the mediation between differing views of the scope of decentralisation look set to continue to cause friction in the everyday practice of school administration — at least until the discrepancies between legislation such as the Local Self Governance Act and the Education Regulations are ironed out.

Significantly, both the DDC and the Municipality were involved in education-related activities which were not included in the BPEP-focused District Education Plan. Building work was being carried out by both bodies, involving assistance from external donors such as GTZ’s Town Development Fund, as are other literacy, human rights education and early childhood development initiatives. These local government bodies are also involved in providing assistance to schools, providing salaries for additional teachers and resources for furniture and repairs, further inputs which are not considered in relation to the DEP. Indeed, the local government bodies are regarded by schools as an alternative source of funds, when the DEO cannot offer support. One school had to turn to the DDC for help when the ground around the school collapsed and damaged the infrastructure. The government and the DEO were, a DDC official noted, not interested in helping as, “while the central government are interested in the creation of School Management Committees to advance their political

³⁹ The DEP should, from the DDC perspective, be seen as one dimension of the broader District Development Plan, a process which has been initiated independently of the DEP plans, under the auspices of the Local Governance Project (LGP 2000a, b) and in line with the Local Self Governance Act (2056).

⁴⁰ The DDC also interpreted the current moves towards decentralisation as a process which would allow them to bypass central government and establish a direct relationship with the donors, expressing an interest in having dialogue with specific donors about the requirements of the district. Indeed, when the head of DFID’s Country Office visited the district she was asked if the agency would be able to directly fund the DDC, as they felt that recent changes in legislation meant that

interests, they are not actually wanting to help the schools” (f/n: 14/4/00). This further highlights the very limited nature of the DEP exercise, and the extent to which it is an extended application process for BPEP funds as opposed to a comprehensive review of the education sector in the district.

District Planning at the School Level

The vast majority of the head teachers interviewed as part of the research were aware of the “five-year planning” exercise and of the forms and surveys which had to be completed and they had participated in the initiative to varying degrees.⁴¹ Throughout, there was a strong sense at the school level that the actual plan preparation was predominantly for the RPs and the DEO staff to complete, schools were simply required to provide the raw data. A degree of optimism was, however, expressed by a few head teachers. They believed that donor interest in the initiative could ensure that the needs of the school would be taken into account to a greater degree than in previous cases. Others were more circumspect, taking the attitude that they would ‘believe it when they see it’ — they were not optimistic about being given the requested resources. Over the course of the first year of implementation, this view became even more prevalent, as teachers began to realise that their requests were not going to be met immediately, if at all. Again, exploring the process in context is crucial to understanding the relationship between schools, communities and the DEO and the way that the planning activities were conducted.

Following the delivery of a letter explaining the adoption of a new planning system, a meeting was held in each Resource Centre in November 1999 when forms were distributed to head teachers and instructions on how to undertake the planning were explained. Schools were then expected to prepare the necessary information and have it ready for collection by the RP in early December. Schools were advised to undertake community surveys to gather information about the communities served by the school, but in practice the process was generally completed by the head teacher and selected staff in the school office.⁴²

decisions made by the DDC Council were the final authority and could not be bypassed by the National Planning Commission (f/n: 14/4/00).

⁴¹ Only one school visited had not received information about the exercise and the Head-Sir was not aware of District Education Planning. He showed us a number of other forms and letters he received from the DEO, but not anything related to the DEP. Partly this could have been the result of confusion and translation difficulties, but during the four visits made to the school neither the Head-Sir nor any of the teachers showed any awareness of the new exercise.

⁴² One school visited had conducted a community survey, as suggested in the model for DEP preparation, a procedure which involved the closure of the school for a week and staff interviewing a number of households in the area. This unusual drive to present a comprehensive survey and show a strong commitment to the DEP process appeared to be directed at gaining donor support and, notably,

The forms issued to schools aimed to build up a picture of the conditions in each school through a predominantly quantitative analysis, with questions about the number of students and teachers, the number of classrooms, tables and benches and the gender, age and ethnic make-up of the student population. A table was also included asking whether schools had access to water, a separate girls' toilet and if there was a boundary wall around the playground. A number of head teachers expressed some surprise at the questions on the form concerning caste and ethnic group, with one Head-Sir noting that "the DEO is asking about *jat* (ethnicity) and gender, but there are so many different groups in the school and it is not a problem. I don't know why they are asking" (f/n: 21/2/00). Another told me that "the recent request for data had lots of questions about caste. The DEO feels it is important to collect this data, but the school doesn't see it as important at all" (f/n: 22/2/00). There is, then, a clear sense that the parameters of the planning exercise were established before the school data was collected, with little scope for schools to voice their particular problems. The collection of data, while claiming to offer an opportunity for school- and locale-specific concerns to be raised, limits discussion to areas which are comparable across cases and which can be addressed through external inputs. In particular, there was no space for schools to raise issues such as the non-attendance of teachers, security problems or political influence in the school, issues frequently highlighted during my own interviews with teachers.

The reliability of the data which was actually collected and the pressures which exist for schools to provide inaccurate information to the district level must also be considered. The requests for data encourage schools to give fixed responses, even though these will often not reflect the day-to-day experience of schooling. Student numbers are a key example, with actual attendance frequently 20 to 50 per cent *less* than the enrolment level. One school had 206 children enrolled and claimed that 160 regularly attended, although the figure appeared to be closer to 100 on the occasions I visited (f/n: various, including 21/2/00, 3/5/00, 1/11/00). Similarly, figures for the number of school teachers cannot reflect actual practice, with the number of people who collect salaries not necessarily tallying with the teachers who

directly opposing the RP who was considered to have made little effort with the process and was more widely resented in the area for his infrequent visits and lack of concern for the schools. By engaging in detailed data collection, the head teacher hoped that 'something will happen for the school'. He explained that 'before money came via the government to the DEO and then to the school' and that things would be better now if funds 'came direct to the schools from the donors instead of coming through everyone' (f/n: 25/4/00).

turn up to school on a regular basis. Teachers are frequently away “on private leave”⁴³ or on official business which takes them out of the school for training, to collect salaries from the DEO or to lobby various offices to get funding for school activities. Indeed, it was rare to visit a school which was staffed by the full complement of teachers.

In addition, with strict formulae used to determine the eligibility of schools for resources, such as extra teachers or classrooms, there are considerable incentives for schools to manipulate numbers to secure maximum financial benefits. Formulae specify, for example, the ratio of students per teacher and the number of students per area of classroom space and financing of inputs is tied to the numbers entered in the DEP form. This connection between pupil numbers and new building construction was more tightly defined at the November 2000 donor mission. Districts and VDCs are only eligible for support for physical facilities development if they have a gross enrolment rate of less than 100% and a girls net enrolment ratio of less than 60%. Data such as the age of school-going children is therefore amended to allow claims for additional teachers to be made. The practice of ‘boosting’ the age of class one children is particularly common: despite claims by teachers that all the children in class one were over the age of 6 (the current age of enrolment to government school), visits to classrooms showed toddlers as young as 2 or 3 sitting on benches. The provision of accurate data is not seen as a priority at the school level. The need to obtain access to new sources of funding and resources is the overriding concern and the sense is that the monitoring conducted by the RP is unlikely to highlight any discrepancies.

Further, the whole DEP process directs considerable attention and resources at the primary level, ignoring the interconnections between the primary and secondary sub-sectors in the everyday practices of the school. These areas are dealt with in relative isolation at the central level, with separate sections within the new Ministry and Department framework established and limited contact taking place between the BPEP and secondary sector donors.⁴⁴ This division is less stark at the district and school levels. Many schools, including all those selected as Resource Centres, provide primary and secondary classes, encompassing Class 1 to Class 10, and occasionally even higher secondary (Classes 11 and

⁴³ This term encompassed a range of activities, including teachers taking time off to tend to their own business affairs or dealing with family matters. In one school teachers complained that the head teacher was rarely seen in the school because there was always something wrong or someone was ill. He was currently in the district headquarters as his wife was ill, and they were not sure when he would return (f/n: 22/10/00).

12). Here, the relative significance seems to reverse the central level priorities. Secondary schooling is seen as more important by teachers, students and DEO staff alike. Indeed, during one of my school visits, the Resource Person was berated by teachers for only ever asking about the primary classes. Teachers complained that the DEO was not providing resources for the secondary teachers, despite the majority of the problems experienced by the school being related to the higher classes. While on this occasion the RP placated them by speaking to the Class 9 students who were complaining about poor teaching, he told the teachers that in future all such complaints had to go to the DEO directly as it was not the RP's job to deal with this (f/n: 13/11/00). The disparity in resource distribution between the primary and secondary sectors is clearly evident, as is the relative time that DEO staff are able to devote to each sub-sector, issues given little discursive space within current BPEP frameworks.

In addition to involving school staff in the DEP process, RPs and head teachers were expected to invite the participation of other "major stakeholders" from the community (PIP 1999: xv-xvii). There was, however, very little evidence of co-operation between the local government bodies and the DEO or RPs. As one Village Development Committee Chairman explained, "The education planning process did not involve the VDC. It just went from the DEO to the schools. The Resource Person hasn't had any contact with the VDC and didn't come to talk to me when he came to visit last time" (f/n: 26/4/00). Sometimes this lack of communication led to important information being ignored and survey data collected by one institution not being made available to others. This was particularly evident in the case of the Municipality office, which had a considerable amount of data relating to population growth in the area that was much more up to date than the figures used by the DEO team. Thus, as was depicted in the introduction to this chapter, inaccurate population data were used for the preparation of the DEP, even though more current statistics were available.

The way 'boarding schools'⁴⁵ were included in the DEP process highlights the broader relationship between private sector education and the state — a general pattern of extraction and pressure to comply with regulations, with very little being given in return. Indeed, private schools get no access to the staff training or information about courses that are made

⁴⁴ This is most notable in the area of teacher training, with no discussions held between those revising the class 9 and 10 curriculum and the School Leaving Certificate examinations (which forms the entry level qualification for teachers) and BPEP officials.

⁴⁵ Private schools are playing an increasingly significant role in the provision of educational opportunities, particularly in urban area and more prosperous towns and villages. The term 'boarding school' is used interchangeably with 'private school', although few actually offer boarding facilities.

available to the government schools. One Principal noted that he only found out about new materials or changes in the curriculum by frequently visiting the DEO and taking copies of new books when they arrived in the office.⁴⁶ With private schools dependent on their ability to attract students and fees for their survival, proprietors know that they must appeal to a particular constituency of parents in order to secure their advancement. Broader political, familial and ethnic ties thus take precedence over connections with the administration. One private school had come to be considered “the Tamang school”, in reference to the ethnic group that dominated the student body, and it was a commonplace joke in the community that all the students were from the Principal’s family. Another Principal noted that 95% of the students in her school were Newar and she “automatically wrote the name Shrestha on report cards” as there were so few students from other groups (f/n: 18/4/00).⁴⁷ For those contemplating starting a private school, ensuring a clear base of support is essential. Familial ties and strong relations within the wider community are thus more crucial than connections with the education administration as a means of securing resources.

Private school proprietors also realise, however, that they must maintain a cordial relationship with the district authorities and comply with the requests they make. This is partly because doing so will make official registration and the designation of the school as an exam centre for district exams easier, all things which may encourage people to send their children to the school. In addition, there is a belief that maintaining good relations with the DEO will generally make the daily life of the school easier and prevent unnecessary intrusion into their activities, as one Principal noted, “if we make them happy, then they will be happy and not harass us” (f/n: 3/3/00). This interest in gaining favour led boarding schools to comply with demands from the DEO, both in relation to school affairs, such as the completion of the DEP forms, and in ways which more directly benefited individual staff, such as the employment of relatives of key DEO officials as teachers. Thus, while private schools could not see any direct benefit from their involvement in the data collection

⁴⁶ The exception to this was a school where the Principal was a strong Congress Party supporter and friend of the District Education Officer. As a result of this relationship, it was possible for teachers from this school to attend training meetings intended for government school staff.

⁴⁷ A variation on this type of allegiance is the reliance of one school on support from the families of men employed by the Nepal Army who have been drafted into the area to help on road building projects. The school had previously been predominantly Tamang, as a result of the ethnicity of the Principal. After his departure all the Tamang students had transferred to the other ‘Tamang school’ in the area and the new Principal was left to draw on her own support base which, due to her husband’s position as Captain in the army, was the army units stationed nearby (f/n: 29/2/00).

process, they completed the forms as this would gain them favour with the DEO and the Resource Person responsible for their area.⁴⁸

This leads to a wider issue relating to participation in the DEP process and the conception of 'community' constructed in the BPEP documentation. There is evidence that processes such as the collection of school data were not used to involve new groups or individuals in the process, but to consolidate existing networks. The perspectives of parents were rarely sought; teachers explaining that there was little to be gained by asking parents as they were illiterate and 'backward' (*pacchadi*). Teachers in one school explained that parents in the area "don't even know what time school starts or what an admission fee is. They shout at the teachers if they go to the school and no one is there, even if it is late at night. There is no awareness" (f/n: 5/5/00). The Head-Sir was a little more circumspect, explaining that people in the area were involved in as much as they send their children to school, but that they have so many other things to worry about that they can't take a more active role. It is only "when people are satisfied and are not hungry and have basic things that they can begin to think about school" (f/n: 5/5/00). When asked to involve members of the 'community', schools appear to turn to those already connected to political or administrative networks, with several jobs often filled by the one person. Thus a local Ward Chairman is frequently the School Management Committee Chairman, and possibly also holds a position of authority in the Forest User Group or other local committees. Community involvement in District Education Planning therefore tended to comprise discussions among the local elite, who all had connections with people in positions of authority further 'up' the system, through familial or, most commonly, party political ties.

DEP as a 'Ritual of Control'

With its dependence on the collection of information from various levels which meets the requirements of those further 'up' the system, the DEP process can usefully be seen as a series of rituals of control which, on a daily basis, reinforce the hierarchical relationships within the education administration. The extractive relationship between the higher tiers of the administration and the school is particularly evident during the inspection visits made by the Resource Person to the school. No warning is given about proposed visits. Indeed the timing seems to be largely at the whim of the RP and the frequency of visits is largely dependent on the proximity of the school to the RP's home or to the District Education

⁴⁸ Only registered private schools were sent forms to be completed. Schools which had not been officially recognised were not included in the count, which creates further errors in the data.

Office. Visits are experienced by schools as a sudden swooping down of the authorities into the space of the school, when normal patterns of behaviour are disrupted and a quick shift in the form of performance is made.

During my research I accompanied RPs on several visits, observing how they interacted with school staff and how staff changed their behaviour following the arrival of the district official. There was always a strong sense that the RP was there as a representative of a higher authority, there to inspect and report on the conditions in the school. This was interpreted as being both a challenge, requiring a good performance, and an opportunity to communicate any complaints back to the DEO. On one such occasion, we arrived at a school in which none of the classrooms had teachers in them. Many of the children were not in class but were running around outside:

In the Head-Sir's room sat two teachers, who looked startled by the intrusion. The female teacher immediately left to tell the children to go into their classrooms. The other teacher produced the school's record and visitor book, which the RP browsed through. There followed a discussion about the whereabouts of the Head-Sir, with the two teachers using the opportunity to voice a range of complaints to the RP about the lack of teachers in the school, the poor management, the poor quality of the children and the need to repair the buildings. The RP then went to inspect the classrooms, only to find that the peon and a woman who had been grazing her cattle nearby had been drafted in by the female teacher to maintain discipline in the classrooms during the visit. When the RP questioned this arrangement, the response came that they thought that she would want to see the children being taught, even if it was by the peon. The RP then went into the Class 1 room, where children were crushed into two rows of benches at the front, with the rest of the room packed with broken tables and chairs. After sitting at the back for a few minutes, the RP asked the teacher to use the 'pocket board' and the attendance chart which had been given to the school as part of the BPEP initiative. Eventually, the RP stood up and taught the class herself for a few minutes, before complaining about the dirt in the classroom and then leaving. Following this, comments were written in the visitor book, focusing again on the need to maintain cleanliness in the school and encouraging the Class 1 teacher to use the BPEP materials everyday. As we left the school the woman went back to her cattle, the peon and the male teacher returned to the school office and the children came back out from the classrooms (f/n: 22/10/00, see Photograph 3).

This episode highlights the ritualistic nature of the relationship between the school and the district officials, with both parties going through the motions of performing tasks appropriate to the situation. The teachers engaged in classroom activities, using the material that the RP had presented to them, and the RP observed and noted down comments. While the teachers did take the opportunity to express their concerns and attempt to have these communicated up to the higher authorities, there was also a realisation by both parties that this visit was

unlikely to change things significantly. However, the sense that the inspection could be used as a means of communicating ideas up the system was apparent, with the teachers taking the opportunity to voice their discontent over conditions. This was reinforced by another visit, during which all the teachers assembled in the staff room and the RP was subjected to a barrage of complaints, which he said he would communicate to the District Education Officer (f/n: 13/11/00).

The surveillance exercised over schools, and indeed over all layers of the administration, is further emphasised by the broader political context within which decisions are made. Since the return to a multi-party system in 1990, many aspects of everyday life have become imbued with political interests. The transfer of teachers, for example, is influenced strongly by networks of political allegiance and affiliation.⁴⁹ A decade after the change in the system, the question of teacher transfer and the political appointments of staff at school and district level remain the pre-eminent concern of many employees. The practice of favouring individuals with personal or political affiliations over those who may have better qualifications or experience continues.⁵⁰ This is a country-wide phenomenon, with teacher and education office staff appointments generally reflecting the balance of power in central government. Indeed, officials explained that the first batch of BPEP-funded Resource Persons were all appointed by the central authorities and were all connected to the Nepali Congress. As one former District Education Officer explained “I am just like a football being kicked around... I was in [one district] and they didn’t like me much so I was kicked to the Regional Office in [another area]” (f/n: 10/4/00).

While a few teachers considered that transfers were now more likely to be based on requests made by the teachers themselves, there remained a strong sense among the majority that this could change as political events unfolded. Within the district and regional levels of the administration this was even more keenly felt and the need to keep up to date with transfers within the Ministry and with the strength of the various alliances within the political parties was clearly evidenced in the conversations I observed between personnel in the various offices. The hierarchical political party structure, combined with the impact that affiliation

⁴⁹ In his discussion of the influence of party politics on teacher recruitment processes, Hacchetu notes in the case of one district, “The Chairman of Bajhang District Development Committee, who dominated in the decision of recruitment of 90 school teachers for his district, was frank in saying that the merit factor was respected only after the consideration of other factors, personal connection and party affiliation” (Hacchetu 2000: 20).

and involvement could have on the career of an individual, reinforces the 'top-down' inequalities and the power of the central authorities.

It is in this context of continual potential surveillance that the introduction of the DEP process must be viewed. Despite the rhetoric of participation which it is couched in at the level of policy development, by the time it has reached the school it is firmly rooted in existing models of communication. The extraction of information by the higher levels of the administration is rarely followed by feedback or increased provision for the school or DEO.

Multiple Projects and External Influences: The School Beyond BPEP

Despite the centrality of BPEP to the work of the Ministry and Department, the programme becomes just one influence among many impacting on the day-to-day activities in the school. It thus needs to be seen in relation to the other sources of financial and project support available. While there is clear recognition of the broader significance of BPEP within the education system, in terms of the benefits it has provided to any particular school it is simply considered one among many potential sources of income and support. Classrooms were referred to as "the BPEP building" and mention made of training sessions run by the RPs, with sessions on the "whole school approach" and "multi-grade teaching" frequently mentioned. However, money is also sought from a range of bodies, including the VDC, the DDC, local businesses and landowners, or foreign assistance in the form of both project assistance and gifts from individuals. For example, a foreign businessman donated a substantial sum to one secondary school to enable a stone building to be constructed. In this case the two classrooms provided by BPEP were not considered particularly significant additions.

This example highlights a further important distinction, namely the importance of direct personal connections established between donor and recipient for the school and the impact they have on perceptions of the gift itself. In the case of the businessman's contribution, he was able to visit the school following the completion of the building work and an elaborate ceremony was performed in his honour. The event has had a considerable impact on the community; almost 20 years on, people recalled the event. Teachers, several of whom who had been students at the school at the time of the building work, expressed satisfaction that the school buildings were the best in the district. Schools in the Municipality area also

⁵⁰ Such affiliations and personal allegiances also strongly influence decision-making within the political parties themselves, with party work, and the practice of governance significantly affected by

received additional external funds for buildings, this time from GTZ's Town Development Fund. In this case a large sign was erected beside the building site proclaiming, in Nepali and English, that the construction was the result of German-Nepal co-operation. Such an approach remains within the project mode of development assistance which many donors are trying to move away from. In this case, however, the visibility offers an opportunity for something akin to conspicuous consumption, as the school and the Municipality could both emphasise a connection with an organisation outside of the bureaucratically sanctioned networks of communication, a link with the prestige associated with the 'external'. In contrast, the BPEP buildings are not seen in such a light. Despite the widespread recognition of donor involvement at the central level there is little visibility in the school and thus little opportunity to benefit from the prestige associated with 'the external'. Hence many head teachers express an interest in the BPEP donors working directly with the school.

The extent to which direct, personal involvement of outsiders in the affairs of the school is regarded as both financially beneficial and a source of prestige is particularly clearly highlighted by the interest expressed in attracting foreign volunteers. Peace Corps Volunteers have been present in schools in Dhankuta since the 1960s and a string of VSO, GAP Activity Project and Student Partnership Worldwide (SPW) volunteers from the United Kingdom has also passed through the area, working in schools and with the district authorities. Thus there is a strong awareness of the potential role that outsiders could play. In many respects these, generally uncertified⁵¹, volunteers were seen as having considerable authority and were often invited to conduct training for staff. Their influence was also felt throughout the community and for a long time after they actually left; I was told countless stories about the activities of volunteers and the work they did in schools. The ability to personify assistance, to associate it directly with something different from that to which the school is generally accustomed, appears to give it greater authority. This holds for a range of inputs, from financial support to the provision of training.

The District Education Planning process was initially viewed in such a light by district and school level officials, offering the potential to develop more direct, personal relations with the donor agencies. As such it was considered a potential counter to existing patterns of influence and patronage within the education administration. However, during the first round of planning, it became clear the initiative was to involve only limited participation in

factionalism and the splintering of parties.

the process. The frameworks for decision-making largely remained within the existing structures and interest and enthusiasm for the initiative consequently waned. Questions about the activities people are being given the opportunity to participate in and who the participants are have, therefore, to be given further consideration. The act of 'participation' in planning itself being should not be seen as an unequivocal 'good'. As the case of District Education Planning demonstrates, it is a connection with 'the external' and with development, rather than increased participation in the administration *per se* that is sought by school and district officials, a position which firmly places the donor agencies centre stage in discussions of education planning and reform.

The 'Outward Looking' Focus of Participation

The opportunities for participating in the District Education Planning process were limited by the particular interests of those setting the agenda for the initiative itself, the BPEP donors and advisors. Planning exercises and the agenda for discussion and data collection remained within the parameters of the programme and the central education administration focus on the effective implementation of the various BPEP component programmes. Thus, while couched in terms of greater inclusion and broader involvement of district and sub-district layers of the administration, the relationships established through the DEP process were largely extractive. They transferred the required information from 'bottom-to-top', yet limited the ability of these lower levels to influence the agenda of debates. Thus many of the key concerns raised by school and district level officials, such as the absence of staff from schools, security fears or the limited support offered by the education administration itself, found no space for expression in the DEP plans.

Participation in this context is thus an externally generated activity, associated primarily with the BPEP donors and, as such, it was viewed by many district and school staff as an alternative source of status and influence. The initial enthusiasm for District Education Planning was, therefore, a result of its connection with the donors. It offered an alternative source of patronage to those excluded from existing relationships of influence through the administration or political parties. The 'power of participation' in this case arose predominantly from its association with institutions considered to be distant from local concerns, divorced from the structures of the education administration. Engaging with the

⁵¹ While VSOs are generally selected for their professional skills, GAP volunteers are recent school leavers and SPW and Peace Corps consist mainly of recent university graduates.

DEP was regarded as a means of connecting the school or the individual official directly and visibly with processes of development, a source of prestige and potential influence.

However, with the ‘invisibility’ of donors emphasised in the BPEP rhetoric, there was little active involvement of the external agencies outside the offices of Kathmandu. The planning process was implemented largely through existing structures. Further constraints on the form and extent of involvement in the process arose from the webs of interest and influence into which the initiative was inserted. In many respects the DEP further reinforced processes of “creeping centralisation” (T.N. Shrestha 1999), by extending the regulatory powers of the central administration through increased supervision and extraction of information. Crucially, the process further reinforced the connection between the donors and the central government and enhanced the perception that ‘development’ is located in the activities of the Kathmandu elite, with external training given to central Ministry officials and discussions of the Plans conducted between central government and donor representatives.

Consideration thus needs to be given to what people were being given the opportunity to participate in and the meanings that they themselves attached to the processes. Indeed, as this chapter has demonstrated, varying interpretations of the DEP process emerged which affected how people engaged with the initiative. Thus, despite rhetorical statements about increasing participation and promoting ‘bottom-to-top’ planning in the education sector, the direction of communication remains largely top-down. The direction of aspiration, the interests expressed by officials and teachers, focuses on ‘outward’ mobility, the interest in moving beyond the confines of the local towards that perceived to be more modern and more developed.

To understand the power that ‘development’ has as a marker of status and why direct connections with the donors are seen as such a valuable counter to existing patterns of influence, it is necessary to examine the way the idea of development has become deeply embedded in the way Nepalis view themselves and others and become a marker of difference and inequality. In doing so, the highly political and partial nature of schooling will become apparent, and the meanings attached to the act of attending school explored. Within the BPEP discourse, the state is seen as benign, implementing a series of positive development projects for the benefit of individual and social development. Decentralisation, based on the shared goals and interests of all layers of state institutions, is seen as a cross-sectoral ‘good’, an administrative reform which will increase the efficient and effective delivery of services.

Such a view limits discussion of the multiple and competing interests within and between layers of 'the state'. It also limits the conceptual space available for exploring the meanings attached to the school as a non-local institution and the status of 'being educated' in contemporary Nepal. As Chapter 2 indicated, the school and the administration of education has historically been a site through which particular visions of development have been promoted to secure the position of the ruling elite. Thus, I now turn to an exploration of the highly political and selective way in which the relationship between schooling, the Nepali state and 'development' is articulated in the contemporary context.

Chapter 6

Visioning Development and the Nepali State Through Schools

Outside the school a queue of parents and children was forming, rallied by the call on Radio Nepal for people to support National Polio Eradication Day. A government holiday had been declared, with administrative offices and schools across the country closed to allow employees to take their children to vaccination centres and to engage in 'social service' activities which would help the campaign. In the classroom, against the backdrop of a series of NGO posters advocating healthy eating, cleanliness and a well kept school, the Head-Sir and another male teacher were administering polio drops to the babies and children. A number of female health post staff and trainee nurses filled in registration forms for each child and occasionally gave advice to the two teachers, who both looked distinctly uneasy, especially when dealing with the youngest children. A group of other teachers from local government and private schools stood around in the classroom talking to each other and commenting on the procession of people bringing children to the centre. As well as more light hearted school gossip, there was much comment on the state of Nepal's development — a debate which flared up particularly in response to the number of women who were unable to sign the registration cards and had to use their thumb print as identification. The refrain that "Nepal is a poor country", that "education is bad in Nepal" and that "help is needed from rich, developed countries" punctuated much of this discussion. By mid-morning the younger teachers had left to play volleyball, leaving the Head-Sir, his colleague and the nurses to continue the programme (f/n: 21/11/99).

Introduction

The use of the school as a site for the activities of Polio Day is one of many examples of the close association of education, and the school in particular, with national development activities. 'Vitamin A Day' also used schools as a delivery channel and more localised initiatives were organised by international and national NGOs to promote family planning, healthy eating and literacy initiatives through schools. Development messages can also be read off directly from school books, where messages in line with donor agencies' priorities are overtly presented. There is, therefore, a strong connection between the provision of schooling and the promoting of hegemonic development agendas. However, for this to be

the start and end of the story is somewhat facile and ignores the multiple dimensions and interpretations of the relationship between schooling, the state and development and the network of often contested relations and interests played out around the social space of the school.

As the events of Polio Day demonstrate, the rhetoric of development is strongly linked not only to the expansion of state control and the general “governmentalisation” of society (Hansen & Stepputat 2002: 4) but also with a particular vision of the Nepali nation. Linking the delivery of a development ‘good’ to the idea of the nation-state — with King Birendra making a statement in support of the event, the declaration of a nationwide holiday and the use of schools across the country as the site of activities — highlights the strong intertwining of these discourses in the social space of the school. As noted in Chapter 3, current debates relating to schooling in developing countries rarely problematise this relationship. State provision of schooling is seen as a taken-for-granted development ‘good’. There is, I argue, a need to explore further these assumptions and unpack the complexity of the relationship in order to understand the particularity of the visions of the Nepali state promoted through schools. In doing so, it is important to highlight that this relationship is not necessarily benign, but is constructed and used by various groups to advance their own particular interests.

This chapter focuses on the dominant, even hegemonic, discourse of the school as a modern, state institution through which the development of the nation can be promoted. The dominant vision of the ‘Nepali nation’ is strongly connected to, and reinforced by, currently dominant discourses of development. Such an interconnection makes legible specific intra-national differences as well as influencing how the relationship between Nepal and the international community is articulated, with poverty becoming a particularly strong marker of differentiation in the current context. In addition, such rhetoric legitimates the expansion of state powers, mediating the difficulties associated with the imposition of new state infrastructure and, often, the transferral of allegiances from local to national bodies (Gellner 2001: 3-4). This does not imply that there is no resistance or challenges made to this rhetoric. As will be discussed more explicitly in Chapter 7, the school is a site of conflict, where visions of the relationship between the individual, the community, the nation-state and development are contested and alternatives put forward.

Nonetheless, the school remains a site in which particular visions of the Nepali nation-state and appropriate development trajectories are reproduced and reinforced. The school has come to be seen as a site of access to that which is 'other', and more explicitly that which is considered modern and developed. As such, it has come to represent mobility and the potential that the individual can move beyond the confines of 'the local'. This 'otherness' to which the school offers a route is not, however, a benign, apolitical state, equally accessible to all, as dominant discourses on education and development would have us believe. The 'educated' and 'uneducated' divide is not an absolute that increased participation in schooling will reduce. Rather it is a relational concept, dependent on differentiation between groups and individuals. Thus the tension in education discourse becomes apparent. While the school is a site of greater opportunity on one level, it is also a site where relationships of inequality are (re)created and reinforced. It is this, the intrinsically dialectical nature of schooling, that the current global 'consensus' on education as a developmental 'good' fails to address.

The following discussion highlights the complexity of the relationships between the school, the nation-state and development and the dualistic, even paradoxical, position of the school. While it opens the potential for greater equality of access to opportunities and participation in the project of national development, attending school also forms a new marker of social inequality and differentiation. Particular attention will be paid to how the global rhetoric of 'development' and the imagining of the Nepali nation-state are taken up and interpreted by groups at the school and community level, and particularly how these ideas intertwine with perceptions of the purpose and benefits of schooling. School texts are an immensely significant source of learning, reinforced through the rote-learning of material in class and its reproduction in examinations. But the broader experience of life in schools must also be considered, with extra-curricular activities and the 'hidden curriculum' of daily practices reinforcing particular perceptions of the Nepali state as a national, development-oriented and political entity.¹

¹ Indeed, with high levels of teacher absenteeism and of under-performance of teaching duties, the importance of school texts is further enhanced, providing the primary source of instruction for students. When teaching did take place, teachers also demonstrated a strong reliance on texts, with lessons largely focused on 'getting through' the books, rather than teaching round the issues raised. Indeed, teachers in one school complained that the new school texts were not very good. They had finished reading them in 4 months and had nothing left to do for the rest of the year — although none of the activities or discussions associated with each section of the book had been completed. See Awasti & Kafle (2001) on teacher absenteeism.

Through examining the daily activities of the school, this chapter highlights how differing visions of the state, development and the role of education intersect in the social space of the school. It explores how the ostensibly unifying and egalitarian rhetoric of development and the nation-state are, somewhat paradoxically, utilised to advance highly particular interests. The school itself emerges as a site for the promotion of inequality, even in “the name of development” (N.R. Shrestha 1999). I begin by examining the link between schooling and the global rhetoric of development and then explore how this has become intertwined with national and political dimensions of the Nepali state that are largely absent from donor discourses.

‘Bad Habits Can Take Your Life’: Schools as Development Institutions

As has been explored in previous chapters, the perceived link between education and development has become a widespread basis for justifying the funding of education interventions such as BPEP (e.g. World Bank 1999b). A strong assumption remains that schools offer a route through which to transmit development knowledge to the population and, in addition, participation in schooling continues to be seen as a marker of ‘development’ in itself.² This dominant discourse, so evident at the global level, exerts a strong influence over both classroom activities and on the perceptions held by teachers, parents and children about the significance of attending school. Schooling has come to be associated with greater *bikas* (development), offering those who succeed in this sphere the ability to move beyond the confines of the local.

Promoting Development Through School Texts

As was the case throughout the *panchayat* era, so, too, the contemporary formal school curriculum continues to connect the practice of schooling with both national and global projects of development. The school is utilised as an “extension system” for the promotion of particular messages (King 1988: 491). Indeed, the current primary school curriculum (MOE 1992) and textbooks were produced with the assistance of UNICEF and, at the secondary level, particular courses have been introduced and supported by development agencies.³ UNICEF’s mark can be seen in the Social Science curriculum in particular. One book, for example, includes a lesson on children’s rights, drawing attention to the plight of

² See, for example, the indicators of development used in publications such as the *State of the World’s Children* (UNICEF 1999) and *World Development Report* (World Bank 1997, 1999c).

³ One of the long-term Advisors provided by Finland as part of their support for BPEP was particularly interested in assisting curriculum reform, indicating that this external involvement in the content of schooling was likely to continue.

the *kathi* (street children) of Kathmandu and the difficulties faced by child workers. The Health, Population and Environment component of the Grade 9 and 10 curriculum has received support from IUCN (The World Conservation Union) and UNFPA, with the textbook development and publication assisted by these organisations.⁴ The content of this course thus links very strongly with the development goals prioritised by these institutions, namely the need to curb rapid population expansion in the interests of alleviating poverty and protecting the environment.

The Social Sciences section of the primary curriculum provides the most overt promotion of development-related messages. Lessons provide information about specific aspects of appropriate development and inculcate a broader sense that children should engage in the project of developing the nation. The emphasis is on inclusion in a unified project of development, a cohesive community working towards the same developmental goals. The Class 3 book⁵, for example, depicts a group of people (notably boys and men) coming together to build a wall around a temple. Through the content of the textbooks, children are encouraged to see themselves as able to instigate change and are actively encouraged to persuade others to attempt to become more developed.

Throughout the five primary grades emphasis is placed on the need for personal cleanliness, care of the environment and working with others in the community to improve facilities in the locality and work towards broader national and global development goals. The books present images of ways of life to which the educated, developed Nepali should aspire. The Class 1 book, for example, focuses on personal hygiene, with children encouraged to use a toilet, to brush their teeth and to keep their clothes and other belongings tidy. Exercises at this level focus on distinguishing between what is 'right' and 'wrong' by spotting what is unacceptable behaviour in a series of pictures (*Mero Serophero* [My Neighbourhood], Book 1). The distinction is firmly between 'traditional', 'bad' habits and modern, 'good' habits. This position is reinforced in the Class 5 textbook *Mero Desh* [My Country], where teachers are encouraged to discuss with the class the disadvantages people will suffer if they follow

⁴ Significantly, these organisations did not provide teachers to teach this course or any training to school staff. According to a foreign advisor to the secondary education sector, the books were simply sent out to schools (f/n: 19/12/00). However, according to the IUCN website, a pilot test of a source book for teacher training is being carried out, with follow-up visits planned to five teacher training colleges (<http://www.iucn-org.ac.psiweb.com/places/nepal/PROJECTS/projects.html>).

⁵ One nationally-owned publishing company produces all the government school textbooks. Private, English-medium schools have a choice of publisher, although most use books produced by the company Ekta, whose books closely follow the government books content. Two private schools

old customs and superstitions (*rudhibaddi*), as opposed to adopting more scientific or modern approaches to, for example, health care (*Mero Desh 5 Teachers' Guide*).

This vision of appropriate development priorities is extended as the students progress through the school. By Class 4 they are introduced to broader ideas about societal and developmental 'goods', such as the health risks associated with smoking and drinking in the lesson entitled "Bad Habits Can Take Your Life". Children are asked to write slogans about the negative effects of alcohol and smoking and are instructed to consider how else the money spent on such vices could be used. The importance of working hard and not wasting money is extended in the lesson "Our Income and Expenses",⁶ with the story advocating that people should not spend more than they earn and, in particular, large sums should not be spent on festivals and weddings. Rather, students are encouraged to save money in order to be able to afford medicine and to go to school. Strong emphasis is also given to the school as a source of authority which should transcend other markers of hierarchical difference in the community such as age. This educates not only students, but draws parents and communities into the sphere of development. For instance, Class 9 students are expected to undertake a project in which they are instructed to "find someone in your local area who drinks *raksi* (alcohol), ask him why, and tell him why he should stop". A similar project is also set for smoking, with students asked to explain to members of their family why they should not smoke. The school thus not only provides students with knowledge about development activities, but is also a site for promoting changes in the behaviour of the community more widely.

This engagement with discourses of development and the emphasis on a unified effort to move towards positive change in the local and national context is presented in the apparently neutral terms of 'modern vs. traditional'. But it is also accompanied by a fairly explicit valuation of different lifestyles and locales, reminiscent of the hierarchical presentation of different ethnic groups in the *panchayat* era textbooks (Pigg 1992). The curriculum emphasises progress and linear development, specifically a movement from the rural and agricultural to the urban and industrial. As one of the English-medium textbooks commonly

visited used books produced by the company Pashupati, as they were given a commission on each book bought.

⁶ The frequent use of the word 'Our' throughout the texts is also striking, symbolising the vision of unity around the project of national development promoted through schools. In addition to discussion of 'our' income and expenditure, Class 4 students also learn of the need to prevent deforestation and respect the protected areas set up by the government in "Our Forest Resources", and the strong connection between economic development and water resource development in "Our Water Resources" (c.f. Billig 1995).

used in private schools explains, communities pass through a series of stages, from “sleeping in trees” to a “settled life” as a farmer. This linear progress continues as “People exchanged their produce in the markets. Then markets became busy towns in due course. Slowly man went on making progress and reached the present state. Now he is the master of the world” (*Our Social Studies 2*: 53-54). From this construction it is possible to read off the relative levels of ‘development’ of regions and locales of Nepal and relate this to an ‘economic ladder’ type model of progress, where development implies moving “from a lower level of material life to a higher level, from reciprocal production structure to a more market-based system” (N.R. Shrestha 1999: 81).

A section of the social studies curriculum on methods of transport, for example, describes how people in the past would walk as their only means of transport, but now there are cars, buses and even planes. Class 2 learn that “In early days people walked. Now-a-days we have faster means of transport like helicopters, aeroplanes, cars, buses” (*Our Social Studies 2*: 30). This vision of linear ‘progress’ is reinforced in Class 3 where children are presented with a view of development which places different lifestyles in a hierarchical relationship to each other, focusing in this case on technological advancement as a marker of “civilisation”:

The invention of the wheel was a wonderful thing indeed. It was one of the most important inventions made by man. It made travelling easier and quicker. It led to many new and more wonderful inventions. The bus which takes you to school is a result of that invention. The cars, jeeps, trucks, tangas all run on wheels. The train also runs on wheels. The tractors which plough our fields also run on wheels.

The invention of the wheel set man on the road to progress. He started taking long strides towards a civilized life. He was not a jungle man, a hunter or a food-gatherer now. He could use his thinking power not only to discover things but to invent new things also (*Our Social Studies 3*: 24-25).

With much of Nepal still inaccessible by road, this image reinforces the idea that certain areas of the country are more ‘backward’ than others and maintains a strong spatial dimension to the idea of development. Particular places are considered more developed than others, and the ability to move between places is a marker of development in itself. The urban environment of Kathmandu is presented as the apex of development in the country, the destination of travel and a place where more advanced forms of transport ply the streets, in contrast to which “Village roads are rough and dusty. They are not good for travel” (*Our Social Studies 2*: 31).

Schooling and Mobility

The perception of schooling as a source of mobility pervades much of the thinking about the significance of education at the village level, with the school seen as offering students the necessary skills and qualifications to move beyond the 'local'. In particular many people I spoke to believed that the construction of a school in the village would mean the "end of the farming life" and that those who attend school would be able to take up more 'modern' forms of employment, such as working in the civil service bureaucracy or even, the ultimate goal for many, for donor agencies.⁷ Significantly, private schools used this widespread hope that schooling will provide a gateway to a new lifestyle as a marketing strategy, persuading parents to part with their money in the hope that it will allow their children greater mobility. One Principal said he went from house to house in the village, telling parents that "your son or daughter will be a doctor or engineer if they come to our school. If they go to government school they will only become a teacher" (f/n: 22/2/00).⁸ Another school used two young British volunteers working there to persuade parents that this school offered the greatest opportunity for children to learn English and have contact with people from outside, taking them from door to door to meet prospective parents.

In some cases the perception of the mobility offered by the school was more modest, but nonetheless marked the 'educated' out from the 'uneducated', as my encounter with Kalpana indicates:

Kalpana was sitting in the small *thungba* (millet beer) shop which she operates out of her rented room. Initially she claimed that, as she is not married and has no children, she "knows nothing about school". As the conversation progressed, she explained that her mother and father had died when she was small, so she had to look after her younger siblings. She went to work in other people's houses to earn enough money to send her brothers and sister to school. While there wasn't enough money for them to study all the way through the system (the boys studied till Class 5 and her sister completed Class 8), she felt that they now have a bit of knowledge. Education is important, she stressed, as it opens people's eyes to things. At the time other villagers asked why she sent her brothers and sister to school. They asked her why she didn't get them to help in the house, as she had so much work to do. She said that she wanted them to get a good job, and thought education was the best thing that she could give them. Now other people also see the value of studying. They listen to people who

⁷ This marks an interesting shift from the work of Bista (1991) which highlights jobs in the government bureaucracy as the aspiration of those engaged in schooling. In my own research, working for a 'project' was the goal of many young people, as it offered mobility and contact with people from 'outside' as well as better pay and conditions. Participation in the development industry appears to be emerging as a marker of 'development' in itself.

⁸ Such careers were frequently cited as aspirational goals for children by their parents. Such a pattern was also noted by Conrad in her discussion of perceptions of schooling in east Nepal (1997:109).

have had an education. No one will be able to cheat them if they have an education, so she is very satisfied with what she has been able to give her siblings, although she's worried about her own future now that she is alone.

In contrast to those who went to school, she sees herself as illiterate and worries that if she goes to the roadhead or to the bazaar town she won't know what to do. She's scared she won't even know where the bus is going, as she can't read the signs. She pointed to a letter on the table and explained that she couldn't read it. This one was for the landlord of the shop, but when letters come for her she needs to get other people to read them to her. But she doesn't like doing this as letters contain so many private and secret things. From time to time people from the Education Office or from projects come to visit her and say that she should go and study in a literacy class in a village a one hour walk away. But she doesn't think she will bother now, she's 45 and too old, so will just carry on as she is living now (f/n: 13/2/00).

Many people I interviewed expressed views of schooling similar to Kalpana's, including the parents of children currently at school as well as the students themselves. Attending school is seen as offering a route to economic prosperity but also, and often more importantly, to an elevated social status which would allow people to stand up to the *thulo manche* (big people), to be given respect and not be cheated. Those who are illiterate and uneducated were perceived to be 'backward' and to have less opportunity to communicate with people from outside the locality or to travel to places out with the village. One woman referred to the main bazaar town as "like a foreign country", as she could not understand the signs or work out what was going on. Schooling is regarded as a source of potential social and physical mobility, creating a significant marker of self-identity and social differentiation.

To be associated with schools is therefore to be associated with the project of development and carries considerable prestige within the community. This is particularly clearly shown in relation to the status afforded teachers within the community, where they are given considerable respect and their advice is frequently sought when problems arise in the locale. Teachers have also come to play a significant political role as a result of this position of influence. This is not just a Nepali phenomenon; Weber's description of 19th century France refers to teachers as "municipal lampposts", the source of political advice and guidance for the community, and describes "the growing role of the man whose light, however dim, glowed strongly on his parish" (Weber 1977: 318).⁹

⁹ In post-*panchayat* Nepal, the political role of teachers has been fully exploited by the political parties, with the frequent transfer of teachers and administrators being used to ensure they maintain influential supporters in key areas, an issue which will be explored further later in this chapter.

There thus seems to be widespread acceptance that what goes on in schools ‘must be good’. Parents believe that schools must be doing what is best for their children and that they have little to add to discussions. During a conversation with a group of Gurung women in a small bazaar village, the discussion turned to what children were taught in class. While two of the women stated that they did not know what was being studied in school, one woman believed that it was important for children to learn English if they were to travel ‘outside’ the village. Another argued that science was important, although she did not explain why. The women were, however, united in the view that, whatever was taught in school must be good as the teachers must be making children learn ‘good’ things. This perception extends beyond the subjects covered in classrooms to the activities of schools more generally, with tacit acceptance of many practices of the school, including the use of corporal punishment.¹⁰

Discipline, Development and the School

“Discipline makes the nation great”, the motto of a number of private schools, explicitly links the pervasive practice of regimentation and the often violent moulding of children into particular modes of behaviour as part of the project of modernisation and development. Hitting children is regarded by teachers as a sign that they are concerned about the children’s progress and that they wish them to succeed and move beyond the lifestyle of the ‘local’. Corporal punishment, including the use of sticks, is pervasive in most schools and children of all ages are frequently exposed to beatings, often of quite a serious nature.¹¹ However, teachers consider this a sign that they are doing their job properly and seem genuinely to believe that this approach benefits the children. The children, too, appear to have accepted this. A British volunteer teacher, who did not use beating to maintain order, recalled how, when a child misbehaved, another student asked “should I get Sir from next door to come and hit him”?

This passive acceptance by parents is not, of course, universal. In one case, a girl had been beaten so badly that she was unable to eat, so her mother and two other women went to the school to complain. However, they felt that they were not taken seriously by the teacher and

¹⁰ One mother, for example, expressed concern about the beatings her son was receiving in school but felt that ‘he must have deserved it’ and the teachers were doing their best.

¹¹ In one Class 3 classroom, a young boy appeared to be having an asthma attack and was unable to breathe. The teacher, who had just arrived in the room, was concerned and considered sending another student to run to the health post in the nearby village. However, other students informed him that the child had misbehaved in the previous class and had been beaten by the teacher, and this had caused the breathing difficulties. The boy was left to recover without any medical assistance (f/n: 3/00). It is significant to note that the most severe beatings take place in private schools, a difference

the situation had actually become worse with the daughter receiving a further beating as punishment for complaining. This acceptance of teachers' actions can therefore also be considered in terms of the educated, developed marker of authority. Parents who have come to identify themselves as 'backward' and 'illiterate' feel considerable anxiety about going to the school and contacting teachers as they believe they are unlikely to be listened to. The parents' sense that what is being taught 'must be good' may also, therefore, stem from a sense that there is little opportunity for them to challenge or amend school practices.¹²

The apprehension parents felt about approaching the school is, in many cases, well founded, with teachers in government and private schools alike showing little interest in increasing their involvement in school activities or decision-making. Teachers often complained that parents were uneducated and could not understand anything about schools. They bemoaned that parents did not understand why fees had to be paid or what hours the school was open. One Head-Sir informed me that parents would come up and ask him why he wasn't in school, even if it was 7 o'clock at night. Another complained about parents constantly criticising the school, but never offering any suggestions about how to improve it (f/n: 3/3/00).

Thus, when parents complain about their children being hit, teachers dismiss this as the response of 'illiterate', 'backward' people who do not realise what is best for their children. A quote from one Principal highlights an attitude evident in all private schools in the study area:

There are real differences in terms of the types of parents and their attitudes to the school. Not everyone is literate and those who are illiterate and narrow minded give the school harassment about the discipline in the school and complain that children are hit. They also complain if the children are sent home or if the teachers complain that the standard of cleanliness is not good enough. Each day the children's uniform, hair and nails are checked and if there is a problem they are sent away or their parents are called to the school (f/n: 3/3/00).

Another Principal expressed her belief that "we don't beat children unnecessarily" (f/n: 18/4/00), and that complaints from parents showed they were not co-operating with the school in the education of their children:

which teachers explained was a result of the greater interest that the private school staff had in ensuring their students succeed.

¹² Conrad notes a high level of interest in schooling among parents, but little contact is made with teachers. Even on those occasions when they do interact, they rarely talk about children and the school (1997: 99).

Parents are very uncooperative. It's time we educated them before we educate the children. There is no co-operation from the parents and they only complain about the school. Children should be punctual and should be neat and bring their books. Children should enjoy school, but there is a need for discipline. So we punish the children if they are dirty ... One parent came to say "Please don't beat my child". But the child had not brought his science book for one week, so the teacher thought it was right to beat him. I agreed (f/n: 18/4/00).

The values teachers attach to the views and demands of groups and individuals is therefore strongly contingent on their relative degree of education or development. Those considered to be 'backward' are given little chance to express their opinions or have their demands acted upon. For example, teachers at one government school — Danda Prabi — were unconcerned by threats from parents that they would complain to the DEO about their frequent late arrivals and absence from schools. They believed that the DEO would listen to them, the teachers, rather than to the community (f/n: 16/4/00).¹³ Deeply ingrained notions of hierarchy and how people should act in particular situations made it very difficult for those without the correct clothes, contacts or educational background to have their voice heard. At the Regional Education Directorate, an official who had been very affably discussing a range of issues with me broke off to respond to a father and son who had arrived from a town a day's travel away to get a copy of the boy's school certificate. Before they were even able to explain their situation, he barked that he didn't have time to see them, and they should come back the following week. Such events clearly do little to encourage parents or teachers to question the status quo or to attempt to engage with decision-making processes. Indeed, such daily practices actively reinforce existing hierarchies and relationships of power and influence. People have to seek out more educated or politically-active individuals if they are to push their demands forward.¹⁴

Such divisions in status and perceived authority are also apparent between members of teaching staff: some "lampposts" are clearly seen to shine brighter than others. Whether teachers are 'local' or from 'outside' is a case in point. In many private schools teachers

¹³ This is further emphasised with reference to a school where the parents *were* highly educated. One private school attached to a large agricultural project noted that during the heyday of the project, when many highly educated staff were brought in from Kathmandu, the parents were always asking questions and coming to school to point out that homework had not been marked correctly and so on. In this case, according to the Principal, the teachers had felt compelled to respond to the enquiries and adapt their practices accordingly (f/n: 5/3/00).

¹⁴ The parents of Danda Prabi, for example, turned to the Ward Chairman to help them with their campaign. While he was from the same ethnic group, he was relatively well educated and, more importantly, politically active in the district so was able to command greater respect and influence in the various district offices. In doing so the position of the local elite was reinforced as well as the broader structures of influence — politics, education and connection with the 'external'.

considered to be from 'outside' received higher salaries and were generally seen as more desirable by parents and school management. In contrast 'local' teachers were regarded as less able than those from outside. One Principal of a boarding school noted that "we don't want local teachers as they will start making trouble and expand the local influence in the school. Also, they don't have such good teaching abilities as, like the other teachers, they don't have any training. But in addition, they don't have any experience of being taught well in school, as they went to school in Nepal". As we talked, a local male teacher was trying to run an exam paper through a printing machine. His inability to work the machine was used by the Principal as an example of how local teachers "don't have any common sense or initiative" (f/n: 3/3/00).

Schools as Links to the 'Outside'

The school in itself has also come to be regarded as a symbol of mobility and development, being very visibly linked to the 'outside' through connections with external sources of aid and financing. This vision of development contrasts sharply with the call advocated through the textbooks for the local community to take responsibility for improving their own locale. Teachers in government schools in Dhankuta could point to classrooms constructed by BPEP and could reel off lists of "trainings" associated with the various education sector projects, including the SEP and BPEP. Many schools had also had support for building purposes from other external sources, including the striking bright blue-roofed buildings built as part of the earthquake relief initiatives in 1988.¹⁵

Other symbols of the involvement in development activities include displays of pie charts and graphs of attendance levels, developed as part of a BPEP-sponsored training course at the Resource Centres, and office and classroom furniture emblazoned with the names and numbers of development projects. One school had a large sign board in the playground announcing that GTZ were constructing a new building through their "Town Development Fund", while in another the water tap (which had run dry) was in the middle of a stone plaque informing people it was a "gift" from an international NGO. Education, and the trappings of 'development' more generally, are therefore represented as something which is brought to the village from outside, be it from the national government, individual donors or external aid agencies. The physical coming and going of obvious 'outsiders' into the space of

¹⁵ A few schools had been given blue roofs despite not having been affected by the earthquake which hit parts of Nepal on the 31st August 1988, but were given the money as they had personal connections with the Minister responsible for approving grants. A private school in an unaffected area in Kathmandu also managed to receive support several years after the earthquake occurred.

the school — Resource People, District Education Office personnel, donors, PhD researchers and foreign volunteer teachers — further emphasises this, with these representatives of the ‘external’ being afforded different treatment to visitors from the locality. The school bridges the local and the wider project of national development, drawing the local into a relationship with something wider — the idea of the nation-state and the project of ‘development’. Yet, with barriers to ‘free travel’ along this path, a firmly hierarchical dimension to this relationship remains.

By turning now to an exploration of schools as sites for reinforcing the “vertical encompassment” (Gupta 2001) of the local by the nation-state, it will become possible to highlight the inequalities inherent in the apparently neutral and egalitarian rhetoric of schooling and development. The school is not only important as a site of transition from a ‘traditional’ to a more modern and ‘developed’ lifestyle, but also as an institution which helps transfer individual allegiance and identity away from the local towards an understanding of their role as citizens of the Nepali nation. Indeed, schools are institutions through which the territory of the state is demarcated and national culture promoted. The school has, as Wilson notes, become a “focal point through which the state enters local public culture in a more benign guise than, say, the police” (2002: 313). Visions of the nation and development become intertwined, both legitimating a particular construction of Nepal and masking the inequalities inherent within it.

‘Unity Amidst Diversity’: Schools as National Institutions

Haami Sabai Ekai Hau (We Are All One), the title of a chapter in the Class 5 *Mero Desh* textbook, perhaps best conjures up the image of the Nepali nation conveyed through school activities. While the multiethnic, multilingual nature of the population is acknowledged within the text, and the different religious beliefs held by people in Nepal receive consideration, explicit discussion of inequality or tensions between these groups is avoided. In addition, school is seen as a site in which diverse groups can come together and be treated as equal, with that equality based upon their similarity and their identification with the projects of modernity and national development. Unity around the idea of the nation and the project of development are thus not separate rallying calls, but are mutually reinforcing, with the school a site in which this intertwining of the two discourses is particularly apparent. The discourse of unity and participation in an ostensibly incontrovertible exercise may, however, mask social divisions and limit the possibility for action to be taken to address inequality. The construction of the school as a national institution has a similar impact. It

draws students and local communities into a relationship with the country beyond the local and shifts allegiance and emotional affiliation to a broader entity. Yet it also sets up an implicit — and at times even explicit — valuation of the different religious, ethnic and caste groups that make up this apparently unified whole.

Acknowledging Diversity in Textbooks

The picture accompanying Chapter 5 clearly depicts the ‘difference’ which is to be given discursive space within this dominant vision of the nation (see Figure 2). The diversity of the population is highlighted by the different attire of the men and women — the different styles of sari, the *dhoti* of the man from the *Terrai*, the Buddhist prayer wheel carried by the Sherpa, the different styles of jewellery worn by the women and the *topi* of the hill people. While they have come together and appear to be engaging in conversation, they are in effect frozen into their cultural differences. Cultural difference is given recognition at the expense of seeing the inter-relationship between them, and the inequalities experienced by particular groups. The possibility of seeing difference *among* each group is also diminished as caricatures of particular places and people are built up and extended throughout the various textbooks. These differences, as will be highlighted later in this chapter, are placed firmly in the realm of the cultural and the traditional. By contrast the vision of unity is predicated on the engagement with the national project of modernisation and development.

It is also significant that, despite the diversity of the women and men in the picture, the two children in the foreground are shown in school uniform, carrying school bags, symbolising, perhaps, the desired united and modern future of Nepal, with their ethnic identity unidentifiable. Attending school is presented as a means of transcending cultural differences, of leaving the constraints of the ‘local’ and the ‘traditional’ behind, to engage in the modern project of schooling. Indeed, in the exercises associated with this chapter, children are asked to list the different ethnic groups and religions of the people in their class, but are then told that “Everyone came to fulfil the same objective in class and everyone can do it” (*Mero Desh* 5, Teacher’s Guide). Unity as sameness thus becomes an important component of the school experience, marking a transition from a specifically locally embedded cultural identity to an affinity with a national culture and national project of modernisation and development.

While such representations allow an appreciation of some forms of difference between groups, they do not represent an interest in understanding the inequalities between groups, the vast differential in status and economic and political power between ethnic groups,

between *dalits* and higher caste groups, and the domination of educational and government job opportunities by Brahmin, Chettri and Newar elites.¹⁶ Gender inequalities and different economic positions which cross-cut issues of ethnicity are marginalised. Difference is depoliticised, sidelining inequality through a focus on dress, facial features and customs. Cultural difference is celebrated, enhancing the vision of a culturally rich nation and legitimating the hegemonic illusion of Nepal's inclusiveness. Making particular aspects of difference visible casts shadows over other, more pernicious aspects of the relationship between various groups and individuals. Difference is therefore *selectively* acknowledged. The significance and implications of how certain markers of difference, and indeed similarity, are utilised and made salient requires further exploration. The somewhat contradictory vision of the nation presented in schools — the richness of the country's cultural diversity juxtaposed with the strong sense of unity around particular symbols of the nation — deserves to be further unpacked.

Top-Down Presentation of the Nepali Nation

The tight central control over the presentation of images of 'the nation' and the selective nature of the recognition of difference is firmly maintained through the production of only one series of approved schoolbooks for use by government schools. Produced by the Curriculum Development Centre and published through Janak Educational Materials Unit in Sanothimi, on the outskirts of Kathmandu, these books serve as the primary, and in some cases sole, teaching aid in primary school classrooms across the country. In the absence of systematic teacher training and alternative learning aids and the lack of motivation for teachers to innovate or teach 'beyond the text', teaching, when it does take place, is largely book-led and exam-oriented. In line with the broader hierarchical relationships around the school, instructions which come from above must be complied with. Thus messages from the curriculum are transferred via the books to the teacher and subsequently to the class. Fitting into this top-down model, the use of repetitive chanting and rote learning of material further promotes an unquestioning processing of a particular vision of the nation. This was graphically depicted during one period of classroom observation when the lesson "We Are All One" was being taught. Children repeated each sentence of the text over and over, until

¹⁶ A recent article by Kanak Mani Dixit notes, "Statistics from the Public Service Commission ... indicate that in the past decade there has been a substantial growth in the number in the 'Bahun/Chettri' category who get pass[sic] the examinations for the civil service. Simultaneously, there has been a drastic, even heart-stopping, drop in the number of Newar, *janajati* (ethnic), Dalit and people of *Terrai* origin who make it into government service". The figures stated show that, among those who passed their civil service exams and were assigned to ministries, 69% were Bahun/Chettri in 1983-85, increasing to 81% in 1992-93, and now standing at 98%. The proportion of Newars went down from 19% to 11% and stood at 1% in 2000. The figure for the *janajati* category has fallen from 3% to 2.5% and is now practically nil (Dixit 2001). See also Bhattachan 2000a.

they were able to recite it by heart. Questions about the text then involved asking students to fill in the blanks in sentences taken from the story:

Teacher: We are all one.

Class: We are all one.

Teacher: We are all one.

Class: We are all one.

Teacher: We are all...?

Class: ONE!

...

Teacher: Everyone can understand the national language.¹⁷

Class: Everyone can understand the national language.

Teacher: Everyone can understand the national language.

Class: Everyone can understand the national language.

Teacher: Everyone can understand the ... ?

Class: NATIONAL LANGUAGE! (f/n: 10/11/00)

The focus on memorisation, rather than comprehension or critical engagement with ideas results in a predominantly linear transferral of uncontested facts and knowledge about the country. Indeed, even after changes were made to the teachers' guides and books to encourage more critical thought, there seems to be little interest among teachers in taking a more participatory approach or introducing a more locally grounded perspective to teaching material. Project work has been introduced for Classes 9 and 10, at the instigation of the donor-funded Secondary Education Project. This exercise has met with some resistance from teachers who feel that the central, national focus is likely to remain in the School Leaving Certificate examinations. As one Head-Sir noted:

The SLC is organised centrally so the exam might not be relevant to what students study in their local projects. Projects include things like questions about local temples and the gods that are worshipped there. How will we know students are learning the right things for the SLC — the exam may give a question on West Nepal, which the students don't know anything about. There was a meeting with the writer of the textbook and he said that it wouldn't be a problem, but I'm still concerned about whether the students will pass the SLC (f/n: 20/4/00).

At the school level, schooling remains a predominantly top-down, national activity, a position which finds little opposition among teachers or parents. While the content of some of the textbooks is criticised by teachers for being too Kathmandu-oriented, for including discussions of a trip to the zoo, the names of streets in the capital and urban amenities such as rubbish dump sites, this is not accompanied by a sense of the need to develop a more locally-relevant curriculum. Constant repetition and the pervasiveness of particular styles of

¹⁷ Here the book refers to Nepali as the "language of the nation", in contrast to "mother-tongue" languages, which are "spoken in the home".

‘doing schooling’ make it difficult for teachers to think outside current parameters and posit alternative approaches, a perception compounded by the lack of incentive, and the presence of disincentives to work in an innovative manner.¹⁸

As “We Are All One” highlighted, the dominant vision of the nation presented through schooling is of a country of cultural diversity united around a common history, monarchy and language. ‘Difference’ which points to any counter narrative to this is excluded from the texts.¹⁹ Specific focus is given in the school texts to symbols of national unity, with the life stories of ‘national heroes’ the basis for a number of lessons in both the *Mero Desh* (My Country) and *Mero Nepali Kitab* (My Nepali Book) books. The national anthem is the basis for teaching in sections of both these series and the King, the flag and other overt symbols of the nation are scattered throughout the textbooks.²⁰ ‘National history’, or what Onta (1996, 1997) refers to as the “*bir*” (brave) history of Nepal, is also given considerable space within the social studies course. For instance, attention is paid to the unification of the Nepali nation by Prithvi Narayan Shah and to the brave and courageous deeds of subsequent leaders, notably the Shah kings and the leaders of the democracy movement in 1950 which led to the overthrow of the Rana oligarchy.

The history of the rise of Nepal’s unification and the role of the Shah kings is the thread which runs through the discussion of the emergence of the Nepali nation-state. There is no scope within the syllabus for the teaching of local histories. Thus children do not learn of the impact of unification struggles on their locality — how, for instance, local religions were marginalised. Activities of groups which have been antithetical to the dominant vision of the nation-state, such as the Limbuwan resistance movement in east Nepal, are not included in the texts. Rather, students are told that, prior to unification, smaller states were continually fighting each other, thus, by capturing the different kingdoms, Prithvi Narayan was able to include them all in one unified, peaceful country:

So, by making a unified Nepal, the farsighted King Prithvi Narayan Shah made the nation very strong and laid the foundations for a strong sense of national

¹⁸ Resistance and opposition to the status quo does take place, as will be explored in Chapter 7.

¹⁹ This is not to say that all diversity is ignored. There is mention of the various ethnic groups of the Kingdom. Stories are told with children from different locations in the country and from different ethnic groups as the central protagonists. Space is given to description of Buddhist, Christian and Muslim beliefs. Nonetheless, the vision of a Hindu Kingdom with a unified history and a shared vision of the future predominates.

²⁰ Class songs are also given for each level and, at the lower stages at least, are frequently sung in class. These mark the basis for the emergence of new identities and hierarchies along the basis of educational ability, with students unified across the country while being divided into age and ability hierarchies.

pride. No one can take this away. So we are all — people from the mountains, plains and hills — able to say we are Nepali (translated from *Mero Desh* 5: lesson 10).

The history of the ‘brave deeds’ of the currently-dominant group is therefore presented as the history of the country as a whole.

Throughout the curriculum emphasis is given to the national over the local, a marker of spacial difference frequently equated with varying levels of development, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The social studies course moves children from their locality outwards to a sense of belonging to a wider, national community as they progress both through each book, and through the series as a whole. Indeed, the series’ title shifts from *Mero Serophero* (My Neighbourhood) to *Mero Desh* (My Country) as the student moves into class 4. The covers of these books also graphically depict this progression, with the Class 1 and 2 texts showing scenes from around the home and books 3, 4 and 5 introducing pictures of temples, urban scenes including roads and traffic and symbols of development such as tree-planting and hospitals. The national is equated with moving towards development, the local is more situated and static.

Promoting the ‘Language of the Nation’

This valuation of the national over the local is particularly evident in relation to the medium of instruction in government schools. Despite the approval of mother-tongue primary education in the 1990 Constitution, Nepali remains the dominant language of schooling. The shifts heralded by the Constitution allow schools to opt to teach wholly in a local language or provide mother-tongue instruction as an optional subject in Classes 1 to 3. However, without government funding and suitable resources, the only schools able to take up this option are privately funded. Even they are few in number, with limited teaching resources available in such languages and the continued preference expressed by parents for English-medium instruction. Teachers expressed surprise at the idea that instruction could be provided in a language other than Nepali, citing the lack of teachers who speak the local language of books available in the necessary languages. Indeed, languages such as the Rai languages and Magar are oral only, and do not have written traditions. Ethnic and language rights groups are trying to develop these into written languages, but the possibility of these being disseminated beyond the ethnic elite seems fairly remote. The ethnic rights NGO Kirat Yakhtung Chumlung, which was active in Dhankuta, has worked with the Curriculum Development Centre to produce textbooks for Limbu as a Class 1 optional subject. Texts were distributed to those schools in Dhankuta which had a majority of Limbu students. The

uptake of this opportunity was, however, extremely limited. In several schools I visited the books were still wrapped up in their packaging, gathering dust in the Head-Sir's office.

Teachers display little interest in assisting children who arrive at school speaking only their mother-tongue language. Indeed their inability to speak or understand Nepali in class is frequently ridiculed by teachers, often openly in front of the class. Teachers often highlighted the language problems faced in the classroom but generally equated this with the 'backwardness' of the local community. During one interview with a teacher, a boy was summoned out of the classroom to stand in front of me, while the teacher explained that he couldn't understand anything of our conversation (in Nepali) and that he was very stupid (f/n: 1/11/00). Teachers also complained that children could not even ask to go to the toilet — a reason that several parents also used to explain why their children were not happy to go to school. With relatively few people from local ethnic groups becoming teachers,²¹ there is not a strong pool of local teachers with language skills to draw on. In addition, teachers from outside the ethnic group have no interest in learning or teaching the children's local tongue. In one secondary school with a vast majority of Limbu students, the teachers (all male) were local Nepali-speaking Brahmins or teachers from the *terrai*, who had no interest in promoting Limbu language. Even after books and training had been provided to teachers by Kirat Yakthang Chumlung, teachers still took a disparaging attitude towards the students and complained that they were "backward", "uneducated" and "unaware" (f/n: 13/11/00).²²

In addition, few parents want their children to be taught in a 'local' language. Most wish them to learn in either Nepali or, preferably, the 'international language' of English as a way of helping them progress and move beyond the perceived constraints of the village. Even in an area inhabited almost solely by Athpariya Rai, who use their own language as the dominant medium and where many elderly people do not speak any Nepali, there was no interest in having mother-tongue education. "Why should we learn in our own language?"

²¹ In this predominantly Rai area, only 8 people have passed their SLC and 2 have Intermediate Level certificates, none of them women. One man has become a teacher, another works as a volunteer at another school while he waits to hear if he has a place at college. The rest have left the area (f/n: 1/5/00).

²² Even in schools where there were teachers who could speak the local mother-tongue, these teachers were not necessarily engaged in teaching the lower classes, where language difficulties were considered to be most acute. One school in an area where the population was almost 100% Rai (the school had only 2 non-Rai students out of 190 enrolled students) had 2 female teachers, both non-Rai and a male teacher and Head-Sir, both from the local area and able to speak the local tongue. Here, as in most schools, the women were assigned the lower classes to teach, despite the considerable language difficulties both they and the children experienced. Gender hierarchies seem to be overriding the educational needs of the children.

asked one woman, “we can’t use it to speak with other Rais, let alone other people.” The relationship between mother-tongue and Nepali language thus reinforces the supremacy of a national affiliation over the local and has become a significant marker of shifting senses of identity.²³

Promoting Uniformity

A further, particularly visible, symbol of enforced unity is school uniform, which is the same for all government schools in the country — white shirt and blue trousers or skirt. This moulds children into a particular style which emphasises the similarity, and hence apparent equality, of all students. It acts as a clear symbol that the act of going to school takes them beyond their local affinities and connects them to a wider community of learners. However, private school students wear slightly different uniforms from their government school counterparts, with ties, belts and shoes compulsory attire and, frequently, a different colour of skirt and trousers used to distinguish students from each school. This difference in clothing very visibly indicates distinctions between children — the non-school goers, the government school students and those attending private schools — and reinforces the hierarchical relationship between them, with the cleaner, more regimented, more affluent students more distant from the ‘tradition’ of a ‘local’, rural lifestyle (see Photographs 5 and 6). In addition, the use of English language in private schools — even if of a very poor level — connects those associated with them to a wider *international* project, thus highlighting a greater potential for mobility than is offered by the government schools.

The image of uniformity as the basis of the ‘national’ identity and as the ideal to which children should aspire is reinforced through a number of daily activities in the school. Here examples of private as well as government schools displaying strong ‘national’ credentials can be seen. School assembly, held every morning in all schools, is the most visible way in which the nation is, quite literally, “flagged daily” (Billig 1995). Children are formed into regimental lines facing the national flag and commanded to perform military style exercises and to sing the national anthem. Sometimes the ritual is rather half-heartedly performed or

²³ However, this argument is not as neat and clear-cut as it may first appear, due to the significant challenge to the supremacy of Nepali by the use of English as the language of choice in private schools and, increasingly, even in government schools. During the course of the study two government schools in the study area attempted to move towards a private school type model, offering English-medium instruction in parallel with the Nepali provision. This remains at a preliminary stage, with parents offered the choice of English-medium or Nepali nursery and Kindergarten classes, with fees varying accordingly. This idea has been taken a stage further in the town of Dhulikhel, on the edge of the Kathmandu Valley, where a government school has ostensibly opened a private wing, with parallel education systems operating out of the same school building and under the same management.

even actively resisted, by children singing very quickly or very quietly, or timing their arrival at school to avoid performing the exercises. The daily performance of these acts, however limited or ritualistically, reaffirms the linkage between the school and the nation.²⁴ Assemblies are also a forum for the presentation of speeches by students on the 'greatness' of the Nepali nation, with the content generally taken from school textbooks. The daily recitation of details about the country's geography and the brave history of the country's unification further establishes the school as a 'national' institution as opposed to a site of apolitical, universal learning.

It is not just the students who are presented as the 'same' across the nation. Government school buildings are constructed and furnished in a uniform manner, making them instantly recognisable.²⁵ Schools tend to be one of the most prominent buildings in the village area, a very firm and visible symbol of the presence of the (nation) state at the local level. The many images of the nation displayed in the school reinforce this idea. Portraits of the King and Queen are placed in prominent positions above the head teacher's desk in all the government schools in the study area. A small Nepali flag is almost always attached to a pen holder on the desk and posters from donor organisations and from the education authorities cover the walls. One commonly displayed UNICEF poster features images of a school with rubbish bins, vegetable gardens, children in uniform, girls' and boys' toilets and a female teacher (see Photograph 7). Another depicts the 'Symbols of the Nation', while others include images of the goddess Saraswati and the kings of Nepal. In contrast, most school classrooms are starkly furnished, often with only a blackboard and a few benches. The equipment and materials in the head teacher's office is rarely used. This is often justified with the explanation that "only the office has sufficient security to prevent items from being stolen", and the concern that "if items are placed in classrooms or used by students they will be damaged". It results, however, in the symbolic and material resources provided by, and representing, the nation being located spatially near, and controlled by, the most senior person in the school.

The school site is also a space in which diverse ethnic and caste groups are brought together in terms of their physical proximity, with different groups are taught in the same classroom.

²⁴ A point that is particularly clearly highlighted with the focus placed on disrupting school assemblies by the Maoists, as will be discussed in Chapter 7.

²⁵ Indeed, the design of schools often allow the observer to 'read off' the projects which have assisted the school by the style of any additional buildings and décor — blue tin roofs show the Earthquake Relief Fund have been active in the area, while walls covered in coloured pie charts indicate the involvement of BPEP.

They are also brought together in terms of their engagement in the same project of personal and national development. This is particularly the case for secondary schools, which are usually sited in a larger settlement than primary schools. The example of the village of Sukhrabare illustrates this particularly graphically. The school in the central bazaar is a space where diverse groups come together to pursue a common goal:

‘Sukhrabare’ bazaar is situated about 3 hours walk down a ridge from the road. It is the headquarters of the VDC and as such contains a number of institutions which link it with the district and national authorities — a police post, a bank, the VDC office, a health post and the secondary school. Every Friday a weekly market is held here and foodstuffs and consumer goods are brought from nearby farms and further afield to be sold. People from the surrounding area come to meet at this central point and the day is characterised by both economic exchange and the exchange of news from different areas.

On the southern slope of the ridge are a number of villages and settlements, predominantly populated by people from the Brahmin caste, although one village is considered to be Newar and a number of low caste, *dalit* families also live on this side of the ridge. Nepali is the only language spoken in this area — even the Newars here use Nepali as the language of the household. In contrast, the northern slope is populated predominantly by Magar households, although on the lower slopes a number of Limbu families are also located. Here Magar language dominates, with Limbu spoken in the pockets lower on the ridge dominated by that group. In the primary school located on this side, children conversed in Magar language when they were at play, as well as occasionally in the classroom, particularly in Class 1 and 2. Interestingly, one Chettri family who had settled in this area also knew the Magar language, and the young girl in the family conversed freely with her friends in Magar as they played.

Strong social divisions between these two sides of the hill continue to exist, with mutual distrust and lack of respect held by groups on each side of the hill. This is not to suggest that these groups are static or confined to these geographical locations — there is considerable mobility up and down the ridge, to the district headquarters and further afield. But in the local area boundaries are more rigidly adhered to, and the need to maintain both social and physical distance between groups more strongly emphasised. A young Brahmin woman emphasised how, if she visited Kathmandu, or even another village, then “caste and ethnic group doesn’t matter” and she would go into a *kaami*’s (‘blacksmith’s’) shop. “But in the village it is important and low caste people should stay in their place and should not come inside the house or eat with others”(f/n: 24/4/00).

The physical location of the bazaar area marked it as the central point between the different ‘sides’ of the ridge. The secondary school was the central focus of the daily movement of people, mainly students, from both sides of the geographical and social divide. It ran from Class 1 through to Class 10 and a separate 10+2 section and Nursery Class were operated with additional funds from fees and external support. Class 6, the start of lower secondary, is the point where students who had been attending primary schools in their village area,

joined the school and where students from different communities came together in the same class. Yet, while these barriers may break down within the school space, this does not mean wider barriers are broken down. Two girls, one Magar, one Brahmin, who were close friends while at school, explained that they had never been to each others' homes and did not expect to meet outside school. The transition between different social spaces — from the 'local' nature of the home to the more national or inclusive space of the school — marked a shift in what social relations were considered acceptable.²⁶ Physical proximity and the sharing of the same space and participating in the same activities does not mean that the different lifestyles and languages of the groups come to be equally valued. Rather, shared participation is possible only on certain terms — the participation in national activities and a willingness to act as 'Nepalis' as opposed to emphasising particular ethnic traits. This valuation of 'sameness' and 'the national' over the 'local' and 'difference' permeates much of the activities relating to the school, from classroom level to the development of education policy.

The role of the school as a marker of unity and sameness is further emphasised in a story in the Class 4 social studies book which follows a young girl as she travels from Jhapa, in the *terrai*, into the hills of east Nepal. The emphasis of the lesson is on the contrasts between the various ecological zones that are passed through on the journey, the different farming methods employed, the different food eaten and the different ways loads are carried (*Mero Desh* Class 4). The cultural differences and the changes in lifestyle that Ramala experiences are, however, offset by the similarity of schools in each place. Her identity as a 'Class 4 student' allows her to transcend these other differences and become part of the community that she has just moved to. The teacher in her new school asks her to describe the differences she saw on the journey. Again differences are seen as cultural and locally-specific — the style of houses, the different clothing and the different kinds of trees and cattle seen in the different zones. Common engagement and shared experience comes in the form of the visible symbols of development, such as roads —which would, the teacher explains, soon reach Taplejung from Ilam and Dhankuta — and, of course, the school. Notably, the girl and her family are moving *into* the hills, which could be considered against the general pattern of development and mobility focused on in the textbooks. However, this

²⁶ Parajuli's research in Doti District of west Nepal illustrates a similar point, with the school site, on the outskirts of the village, being both physically 'outside' the village, and, to a large extent, free of some of the constraints experienced within the village: children attending the school can become something 'other' than the identities they are confined to in the village. Inside the village there was a clear distinction between the water taps which could be used by Brahmin families and which were

is because her father works for the District Education Office. The move is, we are told, a result of his transfer from Jhapa to Taplejung, so the direction of mobility is still in line with the broad messages of the texts. The state and symbols of connection with the wider national project of development (this time in the form of the movement of officials) are being pushed further into hills. The 'local' is thus increasingly drawn into the sphere of the national and drawn under the jurisdiction of the administrative state, a point which will be explored further later in this chapter.

Schools as the Site for National Commemorations

This idea is reinforced through the use of the school as a site for more elaborate celebrations of nationhood. Events such as Democracy Day, Saraswati Puja Day²⁷ and Education Day are represented in the media as national events celebrated in schools throughout the country. Education Day, for example, provided an opportunity for the political leaders to stress the "values of democratic education" and the essential role of education in the "development of the nation" and the promotion of "employment, development and humanity" (Radio Nepal 24/2/00). Saraswati Day was the most widely celebrated event in the schools of Dhankuta. School buildings were decorated and money was collected from children to buy fruit to offer to the Goddess. On the holiday itself, ceremonies were performed and children and teachers received blessings and *tikka* from local *pandits*.²⁸

Democracy Day, marking the anniversary of the end of the Rana oligarchy, was also celebrated throughout Dhankuta. A holiday was declared and an inter-school speech competition for Grade 9 and 10 students was held on the subject "why and how should students show that they respect their elders?" Speeches were focused on issues relating to the struggle for democracy and thus helped reinforce, once again, the image of Nepal as a democratic, united nation. Speech competitions of a similar nature are regularly held in schools throughout the country. The topics and content of speeches generally draw on the picture of Nepal presented in the social studies textbooks, again reinforcing the dominant vision.

assigned to those of *dalit* castes. Yet within the school, students from both communities worked and ate together and, in the case of boarders, even shared the same sleeping area (Parajuli *forthcoming*).

²⁷ A day to worship the Hindu goddess of wisdom and learning, Saraswati.

²⁸ This was also an occasion for selectively involving the community in the school, with a number of guests — the School Management Committee Chairman, local businessmen and politicians (all male) — invited to attend. This invitation and attendance seemed to be very much about being seen as the '*thulo manche*' rather than actively taking part in anything, with the guests sitting 'on show' at the front of the lines of students and then being ushered into a room for food after the main ceremony.

Within the community, there was a general expectation that schools should participate in such activities. Non-participation was interpreted as a sign of mismanagement on the part of the Principal or head teacher, or of the inferior status of the school. For example, one of the more prestigious private schools in the study area failed to organise any festivities for Education Day, as the Principal was spending most of his time dealing with his own political concerns. This was seen as symbolic of his broader lack of concern and interest in the affairs of the school and caused considerable discontent among both teachers and parents.

Further, economic factors prevented one of the secondary schools in the bazaar from taking part in a cultural programme organised by the District Education Office to mark the Queen's birthday. The Head-Sir considered the students to be too poor and thus unable to provide the costumes and entry fee required. This set up a considerable division between this school and others in the bazaar, with even the Head-Sir describing the children in his school as 'backward' and their parents as uninterested in their schooling. He noted that "the parents are not educated. They are poor so they don't look at what their children are doing and are not interested if they are at school or not. Other schools in the bazaar have children from better families" (f/n: 20/4/00).²⁹ The connection between poverty, lack of development and 'the local' (i.e. not national) is clearly highlighted. Poverty is seen as confining people to a particular place and giving them limited social, or even spatial, mobility.

Selective Inclusion in the National Project of Schooling

The national and development ideal to which the school offers a route is not, therefore, as easily accessible to all. The school does not provide the level playing field to which the rhetoric of EFA aspires. In the daily practices of the school and classroom a more insidious side of inter-group relations is also reinforced. While in certain contexts particular barriers are broken down, in others the school site reinforces social divisions. For example, problems faced by *dalit* students and teachers were widely reported in the press. One story told of scarce water being thrown away after a *dalit* teacher had been seen to drink from the jug. Others described the exclusion of members of the *dalit* community from Saraswati

During this there was no conversation between the men, and they all left as soon as possible, after they had been seen to be present.

²⁹ This contrasts with the view that members of the same community have of their relationship with the school. Many of those interviewed expressed considerable concern that their children be educated and attend school and, if it was economically viable for the family, they wished to send their children to English-medium private school as this was perceived as being the route through which they could gain greater social mobility. Participating in schooling was therefore regarded as a way to circumvent the constraints of poverty, a way to increase their children's social status and, potentially, increase their economic opportunities.

celebrations in some temples. In the schools of Dhankuta there were further examples of such practice, with the reinforcing of social stigma around caste particularly evident. In one school the head teacher was from the *dalit* community, which in itself could be viewed as a considerable departure from dominant patterns of promotion.³⁰ However, while certain barriers had been broken, there was evidence of continuing discrimination. While he was given tea at the same time as the other teachers and remained inside the office to drink it, he sat at a separate table. In addition, while teachers discussed with me the need for equality, they also stressed they would not want the Head-Sir to visit their own homes because of his caste status.³¹

Gender distinctions are perhaps one of the most pervasive areas where the school recreates existing differences, but in slightly different forms. Women and girls are increasingly visible in schools as teachers and students, yet they are not as actively encouraged to participate in activities as male teachers and students. For example, school sports days privileged boys, and girls were frequently relegated to the role of spectators. When girls did participate this was seen by male and female staff and boys as a source of amusement rather than serious competition. Female teachers, particularly in secondary schools where staff numbers were higher, maintained a distance from their male colleagues during breaks and were rarely included in decision-making processes. Much of the discussion about how to complete the District Education Plan forms, for example, took place in the Head-Sir's office. Thus schools rarely involved female teachers in the process, as they spent most of their non-teaching time with other female staff or with older female students. Further, positions of authority were not considered to be female roles. Female head teachers in the district were issued with the same name signs as their male counterparts. One, for example, read "Head-Sir Mrs B.L. Shrestha". In the District Education Office a teacher came to ask for "Ganga-Sir", not realising that Ganga was actually a woman. It was assumed that a person in authority would be male.

The rhetoric of unity, equality and sameness seems to be accepted and lauded by teachers and officials when it is just that — rhetoric. The dominant relations promoted through the daily practices of schooling continue to privilege certain groups over others, often with

³⁰ He was, however, a prominent Congress party activist, with his party allegiance assisting his promotion.

³¹ In another school, during a sports day, when a girl from a low caste family won the musical chairs contest she was laughed at quite openly by teachers and students alike when she went to collect her prize.

recourse to the rhetoric of development. Certain, highly particular, visions of unity and development are more strongly reinforced than others.

It is also significant to contrast the dominant vision of the nation with those images which are not considered acceptable. This is particularly evident in how the District Education Office attempted to exert power over the boarding schools in the area, particularly when Principals were seeking either initial registration or the upgrading of their school to lower secondary or secondary status. One school had been refused registration as its name commemorated a Tibetan religious leader. Its application was finally endorsed when the name was changed to Muktinath School after an important Hindu temple and pilgrimage site in west Nepal.³² The particularly political way in which the exclusion of people from the nation is further highlighted by the way in which the District authorities reacted to the employment of people from the Bhutanese refugee camps of east Nepal. Teachers from Bhutan had been regarded by school Principals as the most able teachers for boarding schools, as their level of English was considered to be far superior to that of Nepalis. Also, as they were refugees, they would work for less money than people brought in from Darjeeling. Consequently, many of the boarding schools in the study district had, or had planned to, employ Bhutanese refugees in their schools. While this plan fitted well with the popular local perception of 'the external', it clashed with the government's perception of the Bhutanese refugee issue and the perceived threat to local employment opportunities which could result from refugees living and working outside the designated camps. A letter was despatched to all private schools in Dhankuta, from the Chief District Officer via the DEO, informing Principals that they should not employ 'foreigners' to work as teachers in their schools. It stressed in particular that Bhutanese should not be employed as they were receiving help from international agencies in the camps and should not be involved in work which Nepalis could be doing. This regulation about employing 'foreigners' is, however, only selectively enforced. Another school, which was staffed mainly by people from Darjeeling, circumvented the regulations by registering those unable to acquire Nepali citizenship cards as non-teaching members of staff.

The issue of national identity is used as a marker of regulation and control by the education administration and central government, highlighting the significant role of the school in asserting the presence of the administrative state throughout the country. As Gellner (2001)

³² More dramatic resistance was faced by a school which was considered to be a 'Christian' school, a case which will be discussed in the following chapter.

has noted, the use of national and development rhetoric helps mediate the extension of state administrative authority. The use of the school as an institution through which the authority of the administrative state is extended and its legitimacy promoted is thus the final strand of the school / development / nation-state relationship requiring exploration.

Schools as Political Institutions

Schools are also used to present a particular vision of the state as an administrative body. Textbooks and the physical space of the school are utilised by government agencies to promote the role of the state as a benign provider of services to the population. In the current context, the promotion of multi-party democracy also features strongly in the texts and activities associated with the school, a site through which the post-1990 political system of constitutional monarchy is promoted. Again, this is presented in terms of the benefits of this form of government, with the administrative rather than party political dimension of the process highlighted. Yet in the everyday practices of the school the combative nature of party politics is dramatically played out, reinforcing both the politically-charged nature of the institution and the highly prized position that an association with schooling, being educated and developed offers.

Schools and the Administrative State

Returning once more to the social studies texts, one can see images of the services provided through the various arms of government. Descriptions are presented of the role of hospitals in maintaining the health of the populace, the police force in ensuring their security and, of course, the school as a source of education and advancement for students. Representatives of the administrative state are presented as the source of information about how to improve conditions in the locality. The lesson "Our Forest Resources" (*Mero Desh 4*), for example, tells the tale of a community attempting to prevent the floods and landslides which had been occurring since people started cutting down trees to plant crops. Students are told that:

The Forest Minister was heard on the radio, discussing the problem of deforestation. So everyone listened. ... After hearing this, the community organised a meeting and decided to help protect the forests. The teacher came along to the meeting and said that the government could also give help with this problem and help set up protected areas. Chitwan National Park is an example of the largest of these protected areas. In these areas people are not allowed to build or farm, said the teacher. After listening to this, they all agreed to the teacher's plan (my translation from *Mero Desh 4*: Lesson 6).

In this story the school itself is presented as an arm of the benevolent state, with the teacher portrayed as the advocate of government involvement and the source of knowledge of state policies. Through such texts, a particular view of the administrative state is constructed. They help maintain the authoritative position of the state as something external to the locality, yet reaching down to intervene and impact on a considerable range of activities at the village level. Gupta (2001) refers to this as a process of “vertical encompassment”, whereby the state comes to be imagined and its legitimacy and authority secured through a range of everyday practices of control and surveillance. These give the impression of the existence of a body which sits above civil society, yet reaches down to control and monitor activities. This vision of the benign leader, acting in the interests of those it presides over, is well captured in the lesson “We Live in a Family”. It notes, “the head of the family acts like a government in the country. If we do our duties and help one another, the family can make progress. There will be happiness. There will be peace and harmony” (*Our Social Studies* 5: 7).

The use of schools as sites for the provision of services to the population further enhances this perception. Here the positive development messages — the administering of polio vaccines, distributing vitamin A supplements, the provision of schooling itself — offer a route through which the government authorities can extend their monitoring and control of the population.³³ While many of these initiatives are externally-funded, they are presented as state initiatives (e.g. ‘National Polio Eradication Day’) and are delivered by local representatives of state institutions such as teachers and health post staff. The presentation of the state as the agent of development and change serves to legitimate and justify its authority and power.³⁴ To challenge the state would therefore be to challenge the proposed course of development, which itself has been legitimated through its connection with the ‘external’ agendas of development agencies.

Further, maps of the administrative units of the country — Zones, Regions, Districts and VDCs — are presented in textbooks and displayed on the walls of the school office. Children learn that such divisions are created to ensure the “smooth running of the country”. As the English-medium text *Our Social Studies* notes:

³³ See also Harper & Tarnowski 2000 for discussion of state initiatives in the fields of forestry and TB vaccination.

³⁴ In a number of ‘off the record’ discussions people involved in central level projects and government ministries expressed the belief that the current multi-party state was being ‘propped up’ to a significant extent by the constant injection of foreign aid funds. The legitimacy of the current regime would rapidly be undermined, they felt, if such funding dried up.

The government of the capital needs to know what is happening in different parts of the kingdom. The government at the local level keeps in touch with the government at the capital and receives instructions. It also decentralizes the administrative powers. It means that people from all levels can take part in the administration of the country (*Our Social Studies* 5: 77).

Such a description explicitly links the role of state institutions in categorising and cataloguing the populace to the enhanced 'governability' of the country. Registration of children in school clearly plays a significant part in this, particularly in a context where pressure is being applied to ensure the correct ages of students are logged.³⁵ Children who have not have been registered at birth can be 'caught' by the system when they enter the sphere of the state via schooling.

The process of collecting data, such as that for the DEP exercise, is primarily for the consumption of those further up the hierarchical structure of the administration. Its collection thus has a strong regulatory element. The threat of possible surveillance at any time further enhances the power and authority of the central authorities. One head teacher noted that he had to attend school every day as there was a possibility that the RP may visit the school. He also knew that, in schools a greater distance from the road, teachers do not attend school for seven or more days without any action being taken as the District Office would not hear about their absence (f/n: 21/2/00). The threat of sanctions against an individual if a bad report is registered therefore has a strong regulatory impact on the teaching cadre. Concern is frequently expressed that promotion or transfer could be blocked if a teacher loses the favour of those further up the hierarchy. Such a position favours the maintenance of the status quo and discourages innovation, as this could be seen as a threat to those who have the power to affect the employment prospects of the teacher.

Schooling and Multi-Party Democracy

The specific nature of the current Nepali state as a multi-party democracy is also promoted through textbooks and reinforced through associated activities. The structures of the political system and the administrative bodies of the state are explained to children in Class 5 and the merits of the multi-party structure extolled, with the importance of voting and taking part in democratic processes stressed. The use of the school as the site where photographs of individuals were taken for voter registration cards during the study period served to reinforce

³⁵ Increased pressure is currently being applied to prevent under-age children attending school, in a bid to reduce the level of drop-out and repetition in the first year of schooling. Gupta discusses

this lesson, while also reaffirming the role of the school as a state institution. The speech competition to commemorate Democracy Day encouraged contributions which focused on issues relating to the struggle for democracy in the 1950s. Notably, this focus also encouraged speeches which extolled the efforts of the political parties, and the Nepali Congress in particular, indirectly praising the current system and government and differentiating it from the *panchayat* era 'party-less democracy'.

A particularly overt linkage between political structures and the school is seen in how the school is used as a recruiting ground for party members, with teachers and students actively sought out by activists. Recruitment focuses in particular on the secondary level, although involvement in primary classes is not unheard of. During the early 1990s in particular, when formal party structures were yet to be developed at the VDC level, the network of schools across the country became a key site through which to spread the message of particular parties. This led to a period of what one former teacher referred to as "over-freedom", with students in particular believing that democracy meant that no one could tell them what to do. Accounts of this period tell of students defying teachers' instructions and refusing to be taught by teachers of particular political parties. There are even examples of teachers being assaulted by their class because of their political affiliation.

In addition schools, of both primary and secondary levels, are frequently associated with one or other political group, determined largely by the head teacher's affiliation. One private school Principal, for example, explained that there are "no Communists in this school. Only Democrats send their children here", and referred a nearby rival school as a "communist school" (f/n: 18/4/00).³⁶ Such distinctions do appear to have some impact on how parents decide which school to send their children to. Supporters of Leftist parties tended to send their children to the so-called "communist school" and Congress supporters avoided it. Such choice, however, is only open to those living in more urbanised areas where a range of schools is on offer. Even in these areas, the ability to choose is only open to those who have the financial capital required for private education. In the case of government schools, the

similar patterns of surveillance and control in the context of child care centres in Uttar Pradesh (Gupta 2002).

³⁶ Supporters of the Nepali Congress often used the terms 'Communist' and 'Democrat' in referring to the main conflicting political positions. This is a result of the attempts made by the party to capitalise on the party's connection to the *Jan Andolan*, the democracy movement of 1990, with slogans such as 'Congress means multi-party democracy' and 'multi-party democracy means Congress' being propagated (Hacchetu 2000: 14). Leftist party supporters refer to 'Congress', emphasising that they are also engaged in the 'democratic' system.

political disputes are often played out within one institution, often causing considerable disruption to teaching.

Government schools are, then, highly politically-charged institutions, sites in which particular conflicting visions and party allegiances are advocated and challenged. The transfer of teachers is largely decided on the basis of political and personal interests rather than the particular needs of a school or the basis of teaching ability. As such, appointments frequently result in political disputes emerging at the local level. During the period of my fieldwork, for example, a vacancy for a teacher arose at a school in Chautara VDC. In this area, the VDC had interpreted the new Local Self Governance Act (1999) as giving them the authority to select the School Management Committee, rather than it being under the jurisdiction of the DEO. Consequently two SMCs, each loyal to a different political party, were appointed simultaneously (a VDC/Leftist supporting one and a DEO-appointed one, aligned with the Congress party). A lengthy dispute followed over which group had the right to appoint a new teacher. First one SMC, then the other, appointed a teacher, although the appointees were unable to take up their post, due to the protests of the opposing group. This dispute continued for over a month, during which time one teacher was responsible for all three classes in the school. The DEO was finally accepted as having authority, until the contradictions between the Local Self Governance Act and the Education Act are ironed out at the central level (f/n: 5/00). Staff in another school reported that a head teacher loyal to the ruling Congress party had been sent to the school, much to the consternation of the community and majority of teachers. The existing Head-Sir refused to leave the school and a tussle for the post developed, with both men racing to get to the school first in the morning. Whoever got there first took control of the school for the day. Indeed, a student-teacher who was in the school at the time noted that, on one occasion, one of the men was locked in a toilet by his rival in order to prevent him taking up the post.

Party politics impacts on the course of disputes at all levels, with even minor local level concerns becoming caught up in political positioning. For instance, when students at Sukhrabare school complained that an English-language teacher had not been appointed, the issue rapidly became caught up in local party political disputes. The primary level students were mobilised against their Congress-supporting Head-Sir by the predominantly Communist-supporting parents and local government officials. Placards were made and a demonstration march around the village organised. Of course, such opposition is not just confined to schools. As one Head-Sir noted, "if something happens, even if someone's

animal escapes into another person's field, it can become a political issue. If someone from another party dies, then some people won't go to his funeral" (f/n: 21/2/00). Schools, however, hold a position of particular significance. They establish a link between local and national political tussles and, as such, remain an important site of political struggle.

There are now more established political cadres at the local level.³⁷ However, teachers are still considered to be influential by political parties. In addition political problems and concerns continue to take up much of the DEO officials' time. One Resource Person explained that political allegiance had now become such an important marker of identity that even the new approach to SMC selection (the election of the SMC by parents) would probably still be divided along party lines (f/n: 13/11/00). The continued inter-party divisions and rivalry is further evidenced by the way opposition to the proposed 7th Amendment to the Education Act, which requires all teachers to have relevant qualifications and to have passed entrance exams, was organised. Rather than mobilising as a unified group of teachers, protests were conducted separately by the various party-affiliated Trade Unions. While the Congress-affiliated National Teachers Organisation and the Leftist-linked Nepal National Teachers Association both planned strike action, organised protests outside Education Offices and advocated the wearing of black arm bands to signify their dissatisfaction with the changes, these were separately initiated, rather than organised on a cross-party, profession-focused basis (*Kathmandu Post* 13/11/01).³⁸

The school is clearly not the only site where such relations are reinforced. But, as one of the most widespread state institutions, it remains a site through which individuals and political parties can attempt to boost their local power bases. Even after the establishment of formal party offices and the development of a strong party cadre at the local level, schools remain politically-charged institutions, strongly influenced by the debates and conflicts which take place between and within parties at the central level. Politics was the most common topic of the conversations I observed among staff, both in the school and in the teashop after the end

³⁷ Teachers report that the level of political involvement in teacher transfer and appointment is now less significant than it has been in the past, although most also note that this is because no local or national elections are currently taking place. As one Resource Person noted, at election times there is still considerable transferral of teachers and of DEO officials. Indeed he felt that it was difficult for them to do their work effectively as they were moved on 'every two years'.

³⁸ Attempts have been made to turn the Unions into more professional, as opposed to political, organisations. During a series of protests by teachers in Kathmandu about the security threat posed by Maoists, joint action was taken with the main teaching unions uniting to protest outside the Ministry of Education, the District Education Office and the Prime Minister's residence. Speakers called for people to 'stay united', even if people tried to divide them. This unity seems to have been rather short-lived, as the protests against the Education Act amendments in late 2001 highlight.

of the school day. The intricacies of policy differences and personality clashes among senior party figures is well understood and the implications that the shifting balance of power will have on the school and individual teachers is a common theme of teashop discussions. The power that the ruling party has to exert influence over even minor administrative decisions at the local level stamps the authority of the upper echelons of state institutions firmly on the school.³⁹

‘Outward Looking Eyes’: Understanding the Particular Vision of Nepal

Participating in schooling does not, then, offer a straightforward link with increased ‘development’ as the global donor discourses assume. Rather, it is a process deeply embedded in relations of inequality. Certain lifestyles, people and places are privileged over others. Historically, access to education has been tightly controlled by the ruling elite within Nepal. Schools have been used as tools through which to promote particular visions of the state, through the formal curriculum, the daily practices of the school and through the inclusion and exclusion of groups from participation in these activities. In the post-1990 period the paradoxes inherent in schooling in the Nepali context have become particularly salient. On the one hand the rhetoric of Education For All has been embraced and utilised as a marker of the more inclusive nature of the reinstated multi-party democracy. On the other, the content and practices of the school serve to re-configure inequalities and legitimate existing hierarchies. The rhetoric of mobility and development is intertwined with a specific vision of the nation and the state, giving increased status to those who are more closely associated with a particular lifestyle. The view of schooling as a source of mobility and development ostensibly open to all has, however, assumed a hegemonic position in the community.

This is clearly represented in the way parents discuss why they wish their children to attend school and what they hope they will gain as a result, which generally involved seeing schooling as a way to move beyond the opportunities available in the immediate locale. Parents discussed their wish to send children to school as a way of providing them greater opportunities, of giving them a “brighter future”. The desire to “give them eyes” (*aakaa dinu*) or to ensure their children have “outward looking eyes” was frequently mentioned as

³⁹ This need to maintain favour with the ruling group in order to maintain job security is particularly clearly depicted in the membership of teacher unions. In Dhankuta the membership of the two largest teacher unions, NTA and NNTA (affiliated to the Leftist and Congress parties respectively), fluctuates according to which party is in power. About one third of the teachers in the district maintain their allegiance to each party continuously, while the remaining third are ‘floating’ members, moving to the side in power, and therefore more likely to be able to assist in school or district level disputes.

the most important reason for sending them to school.⁴⁰ This was discussed in practical terms. If children were literate then they would have a greater ability to understand things and would be able to travel as they would know how to go on the bus and what signs meant. It was also viewed in relation to status. Having had an education, their children would be seen as equal to others and they would be able to stand up to the '*thulo manche*' and gain the respect of others.

There are also clear gradations in 'the outside', with schools which provide English-medium instruction seen by parents as superior to Nepali-medium schools.⁴¹ Those located in the *terrai* were regarded as superior to those in the hills. Kathmandu schools were considered by many as the best in Nepal, although foreign education was seen as even more preferable. Similarly teachers from 'outside' are given higher regard than those from the local area, with those who have come from Darjeeling — where the Nepali King and Queen were educated — or from the UK or US as volunteers seen as having greatest prestige. A couple from Darjeeling who had just established a new boarding school explicitly used the connection with the Nepali Royal Family as a way to encourage people to send their children to their school. When they went from door to door to recruit students, they took photographs of the schools the King and Queen attended and informed prospective parents that their own daughter had attended the same school. Teachers from Darjeeling and Kalimpong were generally offered higher salaries than Nepali teachers, and lack of available financial resources was the main reason cited by Principals for not employing such teachers.

But the 'other' to which parents and students aspire is not a generalised 'other', but a highly particular 'other'. The construction of the Nepali nation-state presented in schools is one which takes as its specific referent a particular vision of Nepaliness — urban, educated, Hindu (predominantly high caste), connected to external processes and engaged in development activities — but is expanded to act as an aspirational model for all; a process referred to by Mohanty (1991) as "ethnocentric universality". While the school may, as Wilson notes, be a "state agent of national culture" (2002:313), the vision of the nation

⁴⁰ It is interesting to note the same association between being educated and improved sight in other studies. Dyer & Choski report nomads in western India discussing how "education is like wearing glasses" (1998: 407).

⁴¹ The greater value of learning in English was generally regarded as so obvious that my questions frequently elicited confused looks and rather blunt responses. The relative advantages of being able to speak English were simply taken for granted. One woman pointed out that she wanted her son to go to English-medium school so that he could "speak to people like you", another turned to the woman who accompanied me on many field trips, and said, "well look at you, you speak English and so you are able to work with people like her".

presented is specific and exclusive. Thus, while the school is heralded as a potential source of advancement and outward mobility, it also, paradoxically, reinforces divisions. It becomes, in itself, a marker of differentiation between the 'educated' and the 'uneducated' person (Skinner and Holland 1996) and between those who are more and less connected to 'development' and the 'nation'.

Further, the widespread popular engagement in schooling and the significant role of the institution in the daily lives of families and communities throughout Nepal has given the school particular salience as a site for political mobilisation. The popular perception of the school as a site of prestige and development coupled with the country-wide reach of the institution makes it a key site through which to encourage mobilisation around particular interests. As this chapter has highlighted, development messages and particular visions of the Nepali nation-state have been actively promoted through schools. Political parties have sought to advance their interests and influence through the site of the school. The school has played a symbolic and practical role in promoting a particular vision of Nepal as a multi-party democracy. It has also gained increasing significance as a site of resistance to this dominant vision. Active resistance to the hegemonic vision of the Nepali state has increased since the restoration of multi-party democracy. Ethnic activist groups and the Maoist movement currently offer the strongest challenges to the dominant view of the Hindu Kingdom and the inequalities that this construction perpetuates. Schools, as an important symbol of the nation, a marker of status and development, and an established tool through which to reach the mass of the population, have also played a significant role in these campaigns. It is to this, the use of the school as a site through which to promote alternative visions of the nation and development, that I now wish to explore.

Chapter 7

Alternative Paths to Development? The School as a Site of Challenges to the Nepali State

The sound of chanting could be heard, getting closer and closer to the Municipality office until the words became audible. "Free the Students! Arrest the Murderer!" A group of school children had assembled in the courtyard and were marching around in a circle, carrying placards and shouting slogans against the police and demanding the Municipality officials listen to their demands. The officer I was meeting with explained that the previous day a school boy had been knocked over by a bus on the main road, and the bus had then reversed back over the boy to ensure he was killed, to reduce the potential costs the driver would need to pay. The event was witnessed by a number of other students who gathered others from the school and organised a blockade of the main highway. The bus was also torched during this demonstration and as a result a group of students were arrested by the police. Consequently, the students had closed down the school, continued the road block and were demanding their friends be released and the bus driver punished (f/n: 8/12/00).

"The janajati communities are illiterate and backward so are not able to confront the dominance of the Bahun-Chettris. These Hindu high caste groups are very wily people... Donors should tie aid to the development of ethnic groups" (Rai activist, f/n: 15/12/00).

Slogans supporting the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) were splashed across the wall of the high school, alongside posters advertising the national conference of the All Nepal National Free Students Union (Revolutionary). Leaflets had been glued to the shutters of the classrooms and the school office. The Resource Person explained that the school had only just painted over similar graffiti, but that it had appeared again recently. I was surprised to see an ANNFSU(R) poster actually inside the school office, and (feigning ignorance) asked a teacher what it meant. He explained that the Maoists had come to the school and told them to keep the poster up. If it is taken down then students who support the Maoists would inform on them and there would be serious repercussions. They had heard that there had been a shoot-out in a school in the adjoining VDC, and many stories of teachers being attacked if they challenge the Maoists. It is best to stay neutral, he explained, if you are not to get into trouble (f/n: 13/11/00, see Photograph 8).

Introduction

The vision of the school as a modern institution oriented towards the promotion of development and a particular vision of the Nepali nation-state is, as the previous chapters have highlighted, a perspective which has assumed a hegemonic position within policy and planning documentation over the last 50 years. It also strongly influences how administrators, teachers, parents and students articulate their relationship with the school. Schools continue to play an important role in holding up the possibility of ‘progress’ and ‘equality’, by proffering the possibility of inclusion in the national development activities of the Nepali state. Far from being a benign institution, the school is highly political, with particular visions and ideas presented as the aspirational models to be promoted through textbooks and other school-based activities. Yet the activities which take place in the social space of the school do not simply reproduce and promote this vision of the modern Nepali state. The school is also a site in which challenges are made to this vision by a number of different groups. The school is utilised multifariously by groups seeking to promote their particular interests and, in some cases, an alternative vision of the Nepali nation-state. As the above examples highlight, schools have been utilised as a site for mobilising support and promoting particular messages by a range of groups — from those with specific local grievances such as the students who witnessed the death of the schoolboy, to the more coordinated, long-term campaigns of ethnic activists and the Maoist movement.

The above stories contrast sharply with the description of the events of Polio Day with which the preceding chapter began. In these examples, the school is utilised as a site of mobilisation against particular aspects of the state — police authority in the first instance and, in the case of the activities of the Maoists, the school itself becomes the focus of attack. However, while the objectives of such groups may be antithetical to the dominant discourse which sees the state as the benign provider of services, there is notable overlap in how the school is utilised by these groups. The school is regarded as a social space in which people from disparate backgrounds can come together to work towards a common goal, whether that be the eradication of polio or action in response to events which directly impact on the lives of students. The school has become a key site for the activities of groups, such as the Maoists or ethnic activists, who seek to challenge the particular basis on which the idea of the Nepali state is constructed and promote alternative visions and practices. This further reinforces the vision of the school as an institution integrally linked to the nation-state.

The school has emerged as a space within which disparate groups can attempt to mobilise public support and gain broad based legitimacy for their viewpoints, providing an opportunity to dominate the state by “acquiring legitimacy through claiming the focal role in societal progress” (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1999: 49). Certain dimensions of the existing vision of the Nepali nation-state as promoted through schools are challenged. Other dimensions of the hegemonic position — such as its claims to modernity — are utilised and even turned back upon the existing order by those promoting an alternative route to social change. In much the same way as we saw the construction and consolidation of the “prevailing political culture, shaped by the Hindu elite” (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1999: 81) aided by recourse to ideas of modernity and the use of schools as instruments of social change, schools have also become key sources of legitimacy for groups seeking to advance alternative visions of ‘Nepaliness’. Given the historical importance attached to the position of the school in the community, activities in this institution provide a useful ‘jumping off’ point for populist campaigns to promote particular interests, with groups able to play on the widespread concern of the populace to provide educational opportunities to children. The ability to combine the particular goals of the group with popular interest in modernity and development, as epitomised in the institution of schooling, helps give their cause greater appeal and salience in the current context.

In this chapter I wish to explore challenges being made to the state through schools by a wide spectrum of different groups. In particular, I focus on the activities of ethnic activists, religious organisations and, possibly offering the most wide-ranging and dramatic challenge, the Maoist guerrilla movement. In highlighting how the actions of such groups challenge particular dimensions of the Nepali state I do not, however, argue that they are offering straightforward opposition to the status quo. Indeed, in many respects it is the continuity with the dominant vision and the issues which are left unchallenged which offer a particularly interesting twist to this story, and which further help elucidate the significance of the school in particular social contexts.

Thus, what I seek to present here is not a clear-cut dichotomous model of power and resistance, but a complex web of different interest groups offering competing challenges to the dominant vision of the Nepali nation-state as presented in schools. These groups challenge and, at times, utilise the vision of a unified, development-oriented Nepali nation-state presented as an ideal in education policy design, school textbooks and the formal school curriculum.

Challenging the Hindu State Through Schools

The idea of Nepal as an explicitly Hindu nation-state is a particularly strongly reinforced dimension of the vision of the state presented in schools, with a number of extra-curricular activities reinforcing this dimension of 'Nepaliness'. The contradictions inherent in the constitution — the recognition of the multicultural, multiethnic make-up of the Nepali populace, while still preserving the supremacy of the Hindu-based social system, religion and values (Kramer 2000: 2) — are reflected in how visions of Nepal are presented in schools. For example, the everyday practices of the school undermine the egalitarian ideals of the formal curriculum. Only Hindu festivals are celebrated in schools, the use of mother-tongue languages is devalued and ethnic groups are openly dismissed as 'backward' by some school staff. A conversation held during a school visit illustrates the point:

The Head-Sir was quite emphatic. "Ethnicity is not a problem in this school. The people in the District Education Office keep asking all these questions about caste and ethnic groups. I don't know why." I put my notebook away, thanking him for his help. We walked together up the hill to the main trail, passing a small settlement of houses. "The people in this area", he said, "they're Magars, they're 'drinking caste people'. Even though they are living and working close to people who have more developed (*bikase*) ways of life, they don't learn from them. All they do is drink a lot of *jar*." (f/n: 3/5/00)

The issue of ethnic difference is not considered an important or problematic issue by the teaching authorities. Even people in the DEO were unsure of the value of including such questions in the District Planning exercise, seeing it as primarily a concern of the donors. Yet, while the issue is frequently glossed over or dismissed on the grounds that schools are working on a meritocratic basis, this is undermined by the everyday practices of the school and classroom, as was discussed in Chapter 6. A firmly hierarchical relationship continues to be presented, with 'backward' and 'developed' utilised as divisive terms, setting certain people, lifestyles and customs apart from, and above, others.¹ The disjuncture between the inclusive rhetoric and the divisive practices of the school does, however, open space within which previously excluded groups can attempt to challenge the existing order and promote alternative visions of 'Nepaliness'. In the post-1990 period, categories previously considered as fixed, such as 'Nepali', have been increasingly contested as people renegotiate their position within the state (Hangen 2000: 53). What is particularly striking is the extent to which this negotiation of identity and status remains within established parameters. Discourses of development and connections with the 'external' are utilised to advance the position of previously marginalised or excluded groups. As such, schools become a key site

¹ Bhattachan (2000b) refers to the current Nepali state as a "Predatory, Unitary, Hindu State".

through which to promote these interests, a point clearly evident in the current promotion of Christianity in the Hindu Kingdom.

Schooling and the Promotion of Christianity

Until 1990 Christianity was outlawed and a number of Christians had been imprisoned by the *panchayat* regime, including about 20 people from Dhankuta. In the post 1990 period the number of churches has grown considerably² and Christians have begun to practise their faith more openly as the Constitution decrees that everyone has “the freedom to profess and practise his own religion” — although religious conversion remains illegal under Article 19 of the Constitution (1990). Despite this liberalisation, there is still evident mistrust of the Christian community, and many people, of all castes and ethnic backgrounds, remain suspicious of those who convert to Christianity and regard them as not truly Nepali. One retired teacher in the study district, who had recently converted to Christianity, explained that since he gave up his Hindu faith he has noticed a change in the way people in the village treat him. He noted that, while before he had been highly respected and people came to him for advice, he now feels people are ridiculing him and laughing at him. Even his own father said that becoming Christian would destroy the culture of the country as Hinduism is part of Nepal (f/n: 26/2/00).³

Those who have converted often do see their decision as one of opposition to the current construction of the Nepali state, both in terms of the discrimination which they have felt themselves on the basis of caste or ethnicity and in relation to their unease with the current practices related to state institutions, which they attribute to the dominant “Hindu culture”. The issue of “equality in the eyes of God” is one which is raised repeatedly by people who attend the various churches⁴ which have opened in Dhankuta. Many of these people are from the poorer communities in the area, from low caste Hindu groups and ethnic

² According to the U.S. Department of State *Annual Report on International Religious Freedoms for 1999* there are approximately 400,000 Christians in Nepal, with over 170 churches in Kathmandu alone (c.f. http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/irf/irf_rpt/1999/irf_nepal99.html).

³ A concern which was reflected in the wider political arena during the preparation of the 1990 Constitution (Hutt 1993: 37).

⁴ I have been unable to calculate the number of churches in the district as a whole, but in the areas visited I encountered 5 churches and 3 schools with direct links to Christian organisations. The south of the district, which I did not visit, has at least 3 churches, possibly more — the missionary living in the main bazaar was unsure of the exact numbers. He explained that the number of Christians in the area was continuing to grow and new churches were opening up that were not yet connected to other Christian groups.

communities.⁵ Becoming Christian is seen as a way of escaping the constraints placed on them by the Hindu society, offering a new sense of self-worth and an alternative route to modernity. Indeed, religious transformation also marks a potentially new way to connect with the 'external' and receive personal benefits, through the connections which have developed between the local churches and Christian groups from other countries. The church in Kangri village, for example, was built with the assistance of Korean Christian groups. They also provided funds for a library and school in the village.

The links to modernity offered by Christianity are expressed in opposition to the practices of Hinduism, which are presented as backward and swathed in superstition. Church-goers often contrasted their lifestyle with the Hindu culture around them, which they saw as involving "drinking, gambling, killing animals and worshipping statues".⁶ Religion, they felt, should not involve the worship of statues or photos, as the Buddhists and Hindus do, as these are man-made. Rather the focus should be on prayer and leading a simple life (f/n: 26/2/00). During festivals such as Saraswati Puja Day, Christian children do not attend school as they neither wish to worship statues nor eat any food that has been offered to the statues (f/n: 10/2/00). This opposition to idolatry is accompanied by a sense that money should not be wasted on unnecessary items. This is again presented as a direct contrast to the Hindu practice of animal sacrifice and the giving of offerings at temples and shrines. Superstition is thus contrasted with modernity as a way of establishing Christians in a position of greater development, thereby promoting and validating the lifestyle of this particular group.

In several cases, people who had converted to Christianity made links between their choice of religion and their dissatisfaction with the existing political culture. In particular they drew a link between Hinduism and what they saw as the pervasive nature of corrupt practices in politics and the administration. They explained that there is no discussion in Hinduism of the need to be honest. Buddhism was seen as slightly better, as they felt that the Buddha had at least talked about the importance of not lying, but this still does not go far enough. It is only through becoming Christian that there is any chance that Nepal can develop, I was told, with people pointing to the "Christian countries" of the West as examples. As one man

⁵ Significantly, however, tackling gender discrimination does not form part of this drive for 'equality'. One man explained that "we should not see people as different. We are all equal. There are only two divisions that are important, men and women" (f/n: 26/2/00), a sentiment expressed by others involved in church activities and in the practice of the church, where positions of authority are held by men and where decision-making processes exclude involvement of women.

⁶ The churches in the area were predominantly Presbyterian, although there was one Catholic linked school.

noted, “if everyone in Nepal was Christian then there would be no corruption. People would be afraid and know that they would have to answer to Jesus Christ for their actions” (f/n: 26/2/00). Despite this open connection between religious faith and opposition to the practices of the state, the Christians still saw themselves as Nepali and made direct connections between their faith and the possibility of help to develop the nation more effectively. Indeed, the large church in Dhankuta bazaar had a Nepali flag in the corner, one of the few pieces of decoration in the hall.

Such attempts to integrate visions of Christianity with those of development and the Nepali nation are further emphasised through the use of schools as sites through which to promote religious belief. During one school visit, my interview with the Head-Sir was brought to an abrupt end with the arrival of a group of four young American missionaries and their Nepali guide. An extract from my fieldnotes picks up the story:

Having covered the main themes of the interview, the female teacher had begun to prepare tea as we continued our discussion with the Head-Sir. Suddenly, we heard a commotion outside as the children in the downstairs classroom came rushing out into the playground. The thud of boots on the wooden balcony outside the office heralded the arrival of other visitors to the school. The Head-Sir laughed, saying no one had visited the school for months and today there were many visitors. Four young men — Americans — squeezed into the room, followed by a Nepali Christian from the nearby bazaar whom I had previously spoken to about the church. The teachers seemed rather confused by the sudden intrusion and so, having arranged to return to the school the following week, Barsha and I left the office and began the climb back up along the trail. Realising, rather belatedly, that I might be missing something important, we stopped on the ridge above the school to watch what was going on below. The students — mostly Bishwakarma (‘blacksmith caste’) and Rai children — were assembled outside the school and were being given bracelets of coloured beads. ‘White is for good’, we heard one of the men say, in English. “Black is to remind you of evil and red is for sacrifice”. These statements were then translated into Nepali by the guide for the children and teachers. The men then began to enact a play about the life of Jesus, although the intricacies of the script didn’t reach us as we perched on the hillside. This went on for sometime, before small packets of food were distributed to the students and the Americans prepared to leave (f/n: 21/4/00).

Here the school was being used to promote a particular position that remains almost antithetical to the dominant vision of Nepal as the world’s only Hindu kingdom. The missionaries offered an alternative construction of what it means to be ‘backward’ or ‘developed’ which allowed those previously placed in a lower position in this hierarchy to see themselves in a different light.

In addition to the missionaries' activities in government schools, three private schools visited during the course of research had affiliations with Christian organisations. A further two were referred to as "Christian schools" by some members of the community, due to the faith of the Principals. While these schools claimed to be interested only in providing quality education to the local community, there was a strong religious element to much of their work. One of the schools actively used the Christian connections as a way of encouraging church-goers to send their children to the school, and stressed that the fact it was run by Christians meant that they would be more dedicated to teaching the children. A Catholic-affiliated school held mass once a week and, while it was not compulsory, they did encourage children to attend, especially when Fathers from the *terrai* or India were visiting.

The Principals of these schools try to promote their version of 'Nepaliness' as an identity compatible with Christianity, but actively resist attempts to mould the school into the existing hegemonic vision through the daily defiance of calls to conform with schooling 'norms'. For example, one private school seeking registration with the DEO was issued with a series of demands which included calls for the school office be 'rearranged'. Specifically, the Principal was told to remove the pictures of Jesus and various saints occupying the wall space behind the Principal's chair, a place normally reserved for the King and Queen's portraits. Whilst this was temporarily complied with, the portraits were replaced after the following inspection visit and have not been the subject of any further comments from the DEO. In addition, when the Principal finally believed he had fulfilled all the points raised by the DEO, the name of the school was challenged as the reference to a Christian saint was not considered appropriate. It consequently became Machapuchure School — after a mountain in the Annapurna range — at least on the registration documents. The school has, however, made a point of not changing the sign board, thereby giving the appearance of complying with regulations, whilst continuing to assert an alternative vision of 'Nepaliness'.⁷

It is significant that concerns about the spread of Christianity were selectively raised. For instance, the Machapuchure Principal highlighted the existence of large, Christian-affiliated schools in Kathmandu such as St Xavier's and St Mary's. These were able to operate even throughout the *panchayat* period because, he claimed, they were providing quality English-medium education to the children of the ruling elite, with teachers brought in from Europe and the US. Ideas about the appropriateness of education for the nation are therefore open to

⁷ Indeed, the local community, and even the DEO officials, still use the old name. The Principal took great delight in showing me a letter from the DEO with the Christian name used on the address.

selective interpretation, depending on the interests of those in positions of power at a given time and a particular locale and the ability of the schools to demonstrate their relative degree of development and connections to the 'external'.⁸

This analysis of the promotion of Christianity illustrates how connecting particular interests with concepts which have gained strong support within the community — in this case education and development — makes it possible for groups to engage wider popular interest in their activities. Schooling thus becomes a promotional activity for the wider agenda of the interest group, be that a religious organisation or, as will now be explored, ethnically-based movements.⁹

The Promotion of Ethnic Interests Through Schools

Since the re-emergence of a multi-party system in 1990, ethnicity has increasingly entered the public sphere as a basis for making demands for social and political inclusion. Organisations representing specific ethnic groups and umbrella organisations such as Nepal Federation of Nationalities (NEFEN or *Janajati Mahasangh* as it is known in Nepali) have emerged as significant lobbying forces at the national level and, to a lesser extent, providers of services in district and village contexts. The term *janajati* has only recently entered everyday parlance, has gained increased salience as a source of identity and group mobilisation under multi-party democracy.¹⁰ While frequently translated to mean 'nationalities' or 'ethnic group', it has come to be particularly associated with those groups who have historically spoken Tibeto-Burman languages (Hangen 2000). NEFEN does, however, act as an umbrella organisation for groups from the *terrai* area as well as the hill groups.¹¹ The coherence of this movement, which incorporates groups from diverse

⁸ Even this school in Dhankuta was able to circumvent the restrictions placed on it as a 'Christian' school through recourse to its external connections. Foreign financial assistance allowed it to pay for the 'hospitality' necessary to ensure the registration was completed and its employment of teachers from Darjeeling and the emphasis on English-medium instruction earned it the reputation of being one of the best schools in the district.

⁹ Development activities have also been used as a promotional tool for commercial products. During one discussion I was told of an initiative by Surya Tobacco, an affiliate of British American Tobacco, to promote seed cultivation in a number of areas in Nepal. This was presented as a development initiative, for the 'good' of the people, but was, the employee informed me, predominantly designed to promote the use of the company's products.

¹⁰ It was first used to mean 'nationality' in a paper by Sita Ram Tamang in 1987 (Fisher 2000).

¹¹ Sixty 'ethnic groups' are currently recognised by the *Janajati Bikas Samiti*. Debate continues over whether the exclusion of Newars from this list in 2000 is justified. Some activists claim that the Newars are both Hindu and relatively powerful, so should not be considered *janajati*, whereas some Newars claim that they too are excluded, and their language is threatened by dominance of Bahun-Chettri Nepali speakers. In a more complex twist, some activists claim that Buddhist Newars are *janajati*, but Hindu Newars are not.

geographical and cultural backgrounds, thus stems from the ability of these disparate groups to unite around their shared opposition to the Constitution. In particular they share an interest in challenging the perceived Hindu-caste dominated, Aryan view of Nepal propagated throughout the *panchayat* era and which continues to hold an authoritative position in the current context. For example, the process of developing the 1990 Constitution sparked fierce public debate over the form the new state and national identity should take. For the first time, interest groups were able to lobby openly for changes to be made and to challenge directly the idea of a homogenous national identity which had previously been central to the vision of Nepal (Hangen 2000: 69).

In their challenges to the existing visioning of Nepal and the practices of state institutions, education has become an important symbol of the objectives and interests of these groups. Schools have become key sites through which attempts are made to promote their views and gain broader-based support for their activities. The ethnic activist groups are attempting to mobilise people around a new form of identity, to make salient a particular representation of difference. Thus, while reference is made to the distinct history and culture of the various ethnic groups, the presentation of ethnicity is done in such a way as to construct an identity relevant to the contemporary context. Such a move requires the direct engagement with the existing dominant discourses of nationhood, development and difference. Consequently, ethnic political movements are currently seeking to “articulate their claims and represent their community by drawing on and countering the constructions of personhood forwarded in [the] state-sponsored nationalist narrative” (Hangen 2000: 53). Schooling has historically been a central instrument utilised for the promotion of the dominant vision of ‘Nepaliness’, and has thus also come to play an important role in providing an alternative to this presentation. The educated / uneducated, developed / ‘backward’ divide remains an important marker of identity and social differentiation in Nepali society (Pigg 1992, Skinner and Holland 1996). It is thus an essential dynamic which must be addressed by those seeking to influence how individuals and groups see themselves in relation to others — including how ethnic identity is utilised as a basis for identity formation and political action.¹²

¹² Attempts are being made by ethnic activist groups to increase awareness of ethnic related issues and to promote awareness of the need to preserve the various different cultures of Nepal and to promote greater respect for these and to see this source of identity as a basis for political and social mobilisation. Alongside this, groups such as the *Janajati Mahasangh* also pursue demands for greater representation of ethnic groups in the administrative and political bodies of the state, including exploring the possibility of transforming the Upper House of parliament into a ‘House of Nationalities’.

Ethnic activists are not directly opposing the construction of Nepali identity and vision of the Nepali nation-state presented in the Constitution in its entirety. Rather, they are currently emphasising the contradictions between its expressed vision of Nepal as a multiethnic, multilingual state and those practices which continue to favour Hindu groups and the use of Nepali (Khas) language.¹³ The *janajati* groups argue that greater recognition of diversity will strengthen “the identity and unity of the country” (NEFEN 2000: 4), and demand that the form of integration and intra-state relations envisaged in the Constitution be more strongly advocated and operationalised. As a respected Rai academic noted, the government is “speaking with its teeth and not with its heart” when discussing ethnic issues. The need now is to ensure it turns commitments into actions (f/n: 15/12/00).¹⁴ For example, while the Constitution recognises all languages spoken as mother-tongue as “national languages” (in contrast to Nepali which is the “language of the nation”) and the Local Self Governance Act 2055 requires local bodies to preserve and promote local languages, this has not filtered through into practice. Indeed, the central authorities have actively prevented local government bodies from operating in languages other than Nepali. Successful legal action was taken against Kathmandu Metropolitan City, which tried to introduce Nepal Bhasha, and Dhanusha DDC and Rajbiraj Municipality which decided to use Maithili as an official language in addition to Nepali.¹⁵

An emphasis on language remains a key feature of much of the *janajati* groups’ activities, an important component of identity which can be used to mark out their difference from Hindu caste groups. Such an emphasis on difference is seen as an important basis from which to

¹³ Kathmandu Newars often refer to their language as *Nepal bhasha*, as prior to the adoption of the term ‘Nepal’ for the whole of the unified former Gorkha empire it was the Kathmandu Valley that was referred to as ‘Nepal’. There is therefore an ongoing debate over what is to be referred to as ‘Nepali’ language. However, for clarity I have used the term ‘Nepali’ to refer to the language spoken across the whole of Nepal (referred to occasionally by ethnic activists as Khas language), and will make the distinction clear on occasions when Newari is being referred to by referring to this as *Nepal bhasha*.

¹⁴ For example, the establishment of the *Janajati Bikas Samiti* (National Committee for the Development of Nationalities) under the Ministry of Local Development is intended to provide financial assistance to the ethnic groups and promote their interests to other government departments. Yet, in practice it has done little and is felt to have made a ‘minimal effort’ to engage with the work of the various ethnic organisations and only ‘gives out peanuts to *janajati* movements’ (f/n: 28/11/00) with much of its funds going on administrative costs. Indeed, there are even reports of Brahmin organisations receiving funds from the Committee and political parties sending their cadres or affiliated NGOs to put in proposals for funds in the name of *janajati* groups (f/n: 1/12/00). In addition, ongoing disruption is being experienced by the Committee resulting in it being unable to release funds for an extended period of time due to disputes over whether non-*janajati* people could be on its Board, with officials from the higher echelons of the Ministry demanding their inclusion.

¹⁵ This decision by the Supreme Court in June 1999 led to the organisation of a series of protests in the affected areas, culminating in a Kathmandu Valley-wide strike, but the supremacy of Nepali as the official language of state institutions remains intact.

claim greater inclusion in state activities. Thus, the census of 2001 was regarded as an opportunity to present the ethnic groups as a more significant percentage of the population than previously acknowledged¹⁶. During this period a key activity at both the central and district level of organisations such as Kirat Rai Yayokha (KRY) and Kirat Yakthung Chumlung (KYC or Chumlung) (who work for Rai and Limbu interests respectively) was the organisation of information events related to the completion of census forms. In an effort to boost the numbers in these categories, people were encouraged to tell the census data collectors they were 'Rai' or 'Limbu', rather than any sub-groupings, and that they were Kirati religion.¹⁷ It was felt that this would give the organisations a stronger bargaining position at the central level and greater leverage to demand the inclusion of ethnic groups in state institutions and challenge the continued dominance of the bureaucracy by high caste Hindu groups.

The arguments put forward do not amount to a challenge to the current state structure *per se*, but rather to the way in which the Constitution and policies are currently being implemented. In particular, the dominant elite is characterised as having anti-developmental traits, in contrast to the practices of those from ethnic backgrounds. As a KRY Board member noted, "Bahuns have never been people to look after the interests of the country. They do not have the characteristic of hard work. Rather they gain their position through intrigue and being close to the ruling class. They were seen as the people of God and they thought the rest of the people were born to serve them" (f/n: 28/11/00). As a result he felt that they did not really care about the future of Nepal and only wished to advance their own self-interest. He contrasted this to the working style of the *janajati* groups, pointing to the Chairman of the Public Service Commission, a Rai, whom he considered a "very uncorrupt and dedicated civil servant". The call from the *janajati* groups is thus to make the state more inclusive and to adopt working styles which reflect the values of the ethnic groups in order to advance Nepal's development.

¹⁶ The question of what percentage of the population are from ethnic groups is not clear. As Fisher notes, "In the absence of reliable data, each grouping or federation can, and indeed does, claim to represent a majority of Nepal's citizens. The government figures have it that more than 80 percent of its citizens are Hindu; the Mahasangh believes that Janajatis represent approximately 70 percent of the population of Nepal; the Manch maintains that untouchables account for 60 percent of the total population; and the Sadbhavana Party estimates that the Tarai contains half the Nepali population" (Fisher 1993: 13).

¹⁷ Ethnic groups should not, then, be seen as 'natural' as opposed to the artificial Nepali nation. Labels attached to groups were, in a number of cases, externally assigned: Rai, for example, is a collective identity which arises from the title given to tribal chiefs by Nepali speakers. The diversity within this category is therefore considerable, and particularly succinctly seen in relation to the diversity of languages spoken among those referred to as Rai (Whelpton 1997: 51-2).

The *National Declaration on Linguistic Rights* prepared by NEFEN highlights the importance of schools as a site through which the rights of ethnic groups should be promoted. Specific demands include the right of ethnic groups to “study and teach their own language and culture” (Article 4), with a further 6 Articles (11-16) focusing exclusively on education as a fundamental right. These include the right to achieve education in their mother-tongues and in the script desired,¹⁸ including up to university level, the reservation of scholarships and higher education places for “students of the language communities relatively backward at present” and a call for communities to “use the education as a means to preserve, promote and develop their language and script, and achieve history, culture and traditional knowledge” [sic] (NEFEN 2000).

In part such demands are about establishing a unique basis for the ethnic identities around which activists wish to mobilise, but they also mark a direct challenge to the inconsistencies inherent in the government position on language learning in school, particularly the contrasting attitudes towards ethnic languages and the teaching of Sanskrit in schools. Activists complain that the compulsory nature of Sanskrit makes it more difficult for students from ethnic groups to pass their School Leaving Certificate, as they must learn a language of which they have no experience. As the KRY Chairman noted, “everyone is crying foul about Sanskrit”, emphasising that this policy confirms that the current ruling elite wish to perpetuate the stronghold of Hinduism and Hindu culture in Nepal (f/n: 28/11/00). Ethnic activists from Rai and Limbu groups noted that Sanskrit was introduced as a compulsory subject for Grades 6 to 10 in 1991/92 and books were produced. In contrast, the government continues to say that there is no funding available for the provision of mother-tongue teaching. The argument that Sanskrit is important as it is the “root of all languages” is, the activists claim, untenable. As a member of Chumlung noted, “there are no similarities with the Limbu language” (f/n: 1/12/00). Consequently, they challenge the government to make Sanskrit an optional subject, along with other optional languages, and focus more resources on the promotion of ethnic languages.

A key problem experienced by those wishing to promote ethnic languages is the dominance of the education administration, from the central to school level, by Nepali speaking, Hindu elites who, at best, exhibit a lack of interest in the issue and at times actively oppose it. As no official at the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) speaks a language other than

¹⁸ Although, significantly, no direct call is made for this to be provided by the state.

Nepali, Chumlung have been assisting with the preparation of textbooks for Limbu as an optional subject for Classes 1 to 3. The ethnic organisation has attempted to distribute the books and promote their use by providing training for teachers in the targeted schools, but feels that there has not been any genuine commitment from the government, CDC or local teachers. As Chumlung officials explained, while politicians could tell Parliament that Limbu, Tamang and Maithali teaching was being introduced in schools, they demonstrated no interest in shifting the initiative from policy into practice. Indeed, while a sum of 900,000 Nepali rupees was allocated for the production of books for the three grades, only the grade one books were actually printed and Chumlung fear that the remaining budget may well disappear. Even those books which were produced were not actively distributed to schools by the education authorities. Chumlung staff had to go to the CDC themselves to collect books to take to schools. The Chumlung Chairman felt CDC staff believed teaching local languages was a waste of money, a view which resulted in their reluctance to advance the programme.¹⁹

The interest expressed by activist groups in encouraging children to learn in their mother-tongue is, of course, only in part about increasing their educational opportunities. Such activities is also strongly about promoting the interests of the ethnic political movement. KRY, for example, are attempting to open a Bantuwa Rai-medium school in Bhojpur District in order to spread understanding of Rai culture. The school would act as a base for awareness-building activities, cultural programmes, and religious-focused instruction so that people know who the Kirat gods are.²⁰

Programmes focused on schools are clearly only one part of a wider agenda, but this branch of activity remains a prominent part of these organisations' work. Yakthung Chumlung's primary aims, for example, include "the upliftment of the socioeconomic and educational condition of the Limbus" (Kirat Yakthung Chumlung 2000). Emphasis is placed on the need to highlight the educational success of Limbu students, with felicitation programmes organised both centrally and in the districts for Limbus who pass their School Leaving Certificate, with an award given to the student scoring the highest mark. Four Limbus who have been awarded PhDs are helping to encourage students to work hard in their educational careers and combat "the psychological pressure put on students who are told that they are

¹⁹ This lack of interest permeates down through the high caste Hindu-dominated administration. For example, when Chumlung invited teachers from a school in Terathum district to a training programme designed to orient them to the new Limbu textbooks, no teachers were interested. The school's peon was sent instead.

slow, and that they can't read and write" (f/n: 1/12/00). Scholarship programmes have also been introduced by both KRY and Chumlung, to help children from the respective ethnic groups to attend school and thus help combat the perception of such peoples as 'backward' and uneducated by increasing their association with the modern institution of the school. Thus, while such groups are challenging homogeneity as a basis for Nepali identity, they maintain a focus on development as a key marker of identity and, significantly, a need for external validation of that identity. This focus is reinforced by the need for financial support for the work of the organisations.

The Impact of External Visions of Ethnicity on Ethnic Mobilisation

Many ethnic-based movements emphasise strong links with external discourses, agencies and interests as a way to legitimate their position further and present themselves as engaged with development processes. Indeed they are particularly keen to emphasise that they are more effectively engaging with this enterprise than high caste Hindu groups. Parallels with the experiences of ethnic groups in other countries and regions are explored and attempts are made to link the activities of the Nepali movement to those of international organisations such as the United Nations. Comments made by the linguist Ballabhamani Dahal in response to NEFEN's Declaration of Linguistic Rights illustrate clearly this emphasis on external experiences as a basis for exploring the situation in Nepal:

If language is strong, the community and culture of the country is strong. Our language, which has been spoken for thousands of years, are our pride, our identity. While studying the Chinese language, similarities were found between it and Kiranti language. In Russia, Lenin has provided autonomy to the minorities and preserved their culture and languages. Mao had played similar role in China to uplift the living standard of the oppressed classes. He had offered equal rights to both 10% minorities and 90% Han community and set an example of lingual equality [sic] (NEFEN 2000: 7).

Here, direct links are made between one of the languages spoken by ethnic groups in Nepal with that of China, reinforcing a distinction between 'Aryan' and 'non-Aryan' peoples. This is further emphasised by the highlighting of examples from countries other than India as potential models for how to address the issue of diversity.

The association of ethnic rights with modernity and development is very strongly made by those groups working in Dhankuta. Direct linkages are made with interests expressed by global agencies and with the activities of ethnic movements outside Nepal. A member of the

²⁰ At present, however, there are only Rai-medium literacy classes being run in the area.

District branch of the Kirat Yakthung Chumlung noted that the Limbu people are “like the ‘Red Indians’ in America” and the central level committee emphasised the links that have been established with other groups around the world who are also fighting for the rights of indigenous people.

The terminology used to describe the ethnic groups has itself been strongly influenced by how an international audience will perceive and relate to the movement. A strong awareness of current international discourses of ethnicity and diversity is evident in the use of the term *janajati* and the way the Nepali movement has constructed itself. An interest in strengthening external linkages as a way of enhancing their influence at the local and national level is also apparent. For example, in 1993, the UN Year of Indigenous Peoples, the movement in Nepal reoriented itself to tap into this interest. The terms *adibasi* (‘first residents’ or ‘indigenous’) and *mulbasi* (‘main residents’) emerged as politically expedient terms for use in the international arena.²¹ This opened the way to the participation of Nepali groups in campaigns at the global level and enabled them to gain the support of international forums such as the UN’s World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, at which a *Country Paper on Indigenous Peoples of Nepal* was presented (National Committee for the International Year for the World’s Indigenous Peoples 1993).

The Kirat Rai Yayokkha draws particularly on the work of UNESCO and the discourse of ‘Education For All’ in defining its goals, including in its aims the achievement of objectives such as the need:

- To wipe out widespread illiteracy among Kirat Rais, through programmes in line with the UN’s ‘Education for all by 2000 AD’. Particularly in more inaccessible areas where Kirat Rais are found.
- To strongly advocate for the UNESCO’s provision for primary education in their mother-tongues.
- To mobilise Kirat Rais for the qualitative and quantitative education to meet the 21st century challenges.
- To develop the Rai languages in equal footing and press for their implementation in school and university curricular by working closely with national and international agencies [sic] (Kirat Rai Yayokkha 2000).

Schooling, and a focus on education more broadly, act as lynchpins to draw the ethnic group into the sphere of development. Buying into the dominant global discourse of schooling and development provides a counter to perceptions of the ethnic groups as ‘backward’ and

²¹ There is some debate over the implications of using such terminology. Concern has been expressed by some groups about the connotations of ‘backwardness’ associated with the term *adibasi*, a term also in use in India to refer to tribal groups (Hangen 2000: 84).

'drinking castes'. This long-standing (often self-) perception is one that groups such as KRY and Chumlung seek to challenge with slogans such as "Drink less; study more" and the introduction of programmes designed to enhance literacy rates, schooling opportunities and, ultimately, access to jobs.

It is interesting that the Non-Formal Education approach adopted by Chumlung is very similar to that taken by more 'mainstream' development-oriented literacy classes, where teaching of reading, writing and arithmetic skills are strongly linked to attempts to promote particular development messages related to health, environment and childcare (c.f. Robinson-Pant 1997, 2001). Chumlung see their literacy programmes, conducted in Limbu language, as providing a forum for presentation of information about Limbu culture, the rights of ethnic groups and information about what democracy is. The provision of literacy classes or school-based programmes are thus used as a route into a community, establishing the organisation as a provider of social services and development 'goods'. To a large extent this means buying into the currently existing model of development and 'Nepaliness' as constructed in dominant discourses about the nation and schooling. The crucial difference is that the ethnic activists are attempting to challenge the current implementation of that vision. They emphasise, for example, the corruption and exclusion which characterise the high caste-dominated system and the more participatory, community-oriented approach they are interested in pursuing.

In addition, groups such as KRY and Chumlung strongly emphasise their connection with the external through their use of donor funds. In addition, the organisations are presented as NGOs as opposed to political campaign organisations. Both Chumlung and KRY attempt to portray themselves as suitable recipients of foreign assistance and, indeed, have had some notable successes on this front. KRY is about to embark on an initiative to catalogue the many different Rai languages used by groups throughout east Nepal with the assistance of the Summer Institute of Linguistics.²² It is also considering establishing a sponsorship scheme similar to those operated by international NGOs, which would see foreign supporters offer assistance to an individual child for a sustained period of time. Chumlung has received funding from the United Nations Drug Control Program to support its drug rehabilitation initiative in Dharan, and has received further support from Danish, Canadian and Finnish

²² It should be noted that this organisation is based on a strong Christian philosophy. This had clearly not been explained to the Rai organisation, who believed it to be interested primarily in cataloguing the various Rai languages. Thus we see a situation in which yet another vision of 'development' is being introduced and promoted through literacy and educational activities.

sources. It currently also has a foreign volunteer working as a Capacity Building Advisor and is seeking the help of other agencies and the participation of further. The ability to present the ethnic movement in donor-friendly terms, engaging in the same discussions and using the terminology of international development discourse, is therefore a highly pragmatic position to take. It allows external funding sources to be tapped into and other routes to influence decision-making to be opened up, through international organisations as opposed to direct engagement with Nepali government agencies.

Similarly, the methods employed by the ethnic activist groups are designed to set them apart from the 'Hindu-dominated' political parties and establish them as potentially desirable 'partners' or recipients of external financing, with the mainstream ethnic activists engaging directly with the rhetoric of participation currently dominating international development discourses. Such a move calls into question the current association of Hindu, urban elites with development. It allows the claim to be made that ethnic groups are equally, if not more appropriately, the locus of development and consequently the appropriate recipients of aid and development assistance (Bista 1991). Such a view is advanced by a number of activist groups. The Chairman of KRY emphasised that, while millions of dollars are pouring into Nepal, the money is being mismanaged by the current administration and a very low percentage actually reaches the intended project or beneficiaries. "Donors should be more rigorous about where money is given", he felt, and argued that giving support to *janajati* groups may provide the most effective route to delivering aid. He further believed that "if we put *janajati* people into the places where policy and planning are done, then maybe Nepal will survive" (f/n: 28/11/00).

This attempt to model ethnic organisations in the image of NGOs is particularly clearly highlighted in the case of Kirat Yakthung Chumlung. As was noted above, the organisation is assisted by a foreign volunteer, whose main role is to assist with the restructuring of the organisation in order to help secure further external financial assistance. During an interview with the Chairman of Chumlung, he pointed to a list of objectives of the organisation that had been written on a whiteboard on the office wall, noting in particular that the interest in 'advocacy' was a new approach for the organisation. He hoped this new strategy would help them gain support from other (foreign) organisations interested in this field (f/n: 1/12/00). As well as contrasting the work of Chumlung with the operating style of the government, there is also a direct comparison being made with the approach taken by political parties. In the view of the ethnic activists, parties "are only active at the local level

at election times, when they open up extra offices to promote the party” (*ibid.*). How the organisation presents itself at the central level and in its district and village work demonstrates an interest in distinguishing its interests and operating style from those of Hindu-dominated organisations, whilst simultaneously drawing on the benefits that come from being associated with the work of NGOs and international NGOs.²³

Perceptions of the Ethnic Activists

Despite these claims to be more participatory and community-oriented, there appears to be a lack of congruence between the approach taken by the ethnic activist groups and the interests of the community which they purport to represent. As was discussed in Chapter 6, the interest in mother-tongue instruction in schools is minimal at the village level. Parents expressed the view that Nepali or English are more desirable options as they provide greater opportunities for their children to gain employment and travel out from the locality. Similarly, support for ethnic activist groups at the district and local level remains sparse. The main political parties continue to be the key institutions through which people seek to gain influence and favour.²⁴

Among the ethnic activists there is a recognition of the different attitudes and approaches adopted by their organisations and by their potential support base at the village level. One Chumlung official noted that “intellectuals feel that Limbu language is important as this is our identity and culture. Others feel that such interest and our language were not important before democracy came. So they think ‘why not learn English and teach children in English as this will help them get jobs?’” (f/n: 1/12/00). Thus the activists see one of their main tasks as educating the ethnic communities about their culture and history in order to highlight the ‘need’ for ethnically-based mobilisation. Such a process is presented in a similar way to other visions of development — a chance to wake up to a new way of thinking, an opportunity to be ‘enlightened’ about how one should act (c.f. Henkel and Stirrat 2001).

Ethnic activists suggest that the aspirational goals held by people at the village level continue to be distorted by the dominant Hindu culture, with the desired lifestyle constructed in the vision of those currently perceived to be successful. In an interview with the newspaper

²³ This contrasts with the explicitly political agenda of the outlawed political party, the Mongol National Organisation, which has a strong support base in the far east and north-east of Nepal (Hangen 2000).

Kantipur, G.B. Kopangi, the leader of the Magar Sangh (an organisation working to advance the rights of Magars), emphasises the significance of this continued aspiration:

The Nepalese government is caste-oriented and the focus is on Nepal as a Hindu country. Even in the constitution it is there and it is much more strongly evident in practice. If the government is not '*jatibhadi*' [pro-high caste groups] and '*Hindubhadi*' [pro-Hindu] then what is the meaning of saying that Nepal is a 'Hindu Kingdom'?... I am saying this to make people understand the politics. While the social evils that exist continue it is difficult for people to understand the politics. Ugly people will try to become like beautiful people, short people will choose tall people. Ethnic groups, oppressed and *dalits* will choose high caste people to vote for, as they continue to try to be associated with what is seen to be better (Kopangi 2000, my translation from the Nepali).

Janajati groups are thus attempting to present an alternative vision of 'development' and modernity which counters that of the currently dominant model. They aim to 'awaken' people to what they perceive to be a more appropriate way of seeing the world.

This sets up a hierarchical relationship within the ethnic groups. It establishes a divide between the ethnic 'elite' — the educated Kathmandu-based activists — and the groups they seek to represent. The former present themselves as more 'enlightened', more aware of the true state of intra-state relations, and thus in a position of greater authority than their less-educated potential constituents.

For example, Chumlung officials noted that most of their members were 'intellectuals', particularly ex-Gurkhas or people who were working for international aid organisations. A similar pattern emerges across the ethnic organisations, with their leaderships largely made up of an educated Kathmandu-based elite who have rejected (or been rejected by) the main political party structures as a mechanism for advancement. Such organisations are not working as equals of those they claim to represent. Indeed a strong hierarchy is evident in the structures of the organisations. The KRY District Office in Dhankuta, for example, had a portrait of the organisation's founder hanging in a prominent position in the room. District activists referred to him in reverential tones, explaining to me that he had been the Principal of a school in Hong Kong and that he could speak excellent English. Thus, while the basis of organisation is shifted from party politics to ethnic mobilisation, the aspirational model itself is unchanged, with educated, mobile and 'developed' remaining key markers of

²⁴ Chumlung, for example, note that there are only 2 families involved actively in the district level work of the organisation in Dhankuta.

success. In this case however, attaining this state is presented as something potentially achievable by all, regardless of ethnicity.²⁵

Such a position raises the question of who benefits from the ethnicisation of political and social demands and whether it can, in its current form, engender mass popular support from its claimed constituency. The educated, Kathmandu-based ethnic elites cannot be regarded as representative of the lifestyle or views of those they claim to be working to assist (Kramer 2000, Pfaff-Czarnecka 1999). Thus, non-participation in the activities of the ethnic organisations should not be read of as a lack of interest in ethnic issues at the local level or a lack of awareness of the inequalities which exist. Far from it: ethnicity appears as a key feature of identity and informs everyday interactions, with often vehement resentment of the disparity of opportunities expressed.

Identification with a particular ethnic group is an important marker of difference, a point of interest and, at times, a basis for discrimination. Caste and ethnic differences were often discussed during interviews and discussions at the community level, particularly at times when I was accompanied by my research assistant, Barsha. As people tried to 'place us', to understand who we were and why we wished to talk to them, questions were frequently asked about Barsha's caste and ethnic background and a discussion inevitably ensued about differences between different groups and — given Barsha's recent marriage — the issue of inter-group marriages. On several occasions, when groups of women gathered to talk with us, a considerable amount of time at the start of the meeting was spent discussing the different eating habits of groups and the words they used for family members.²⁶ In the main this was discussed in a fairly matter-of-fact way. At times, however, caste and ethnic groups were assigned particular traits as a way of denigrating them and as a marker of resentment and opposition to their actions. In one community, where a teacher had been punishing the children particularly harshly and who had not listened to the complaints of the parents, she became the focus of broader resentment of the "proudy" Brahmins, who did not respect anyone else. Her caste status became both an explanation of her actions and also the source of the community's resentment towards her. There was also widespread recognition of the

²⁵ Although it is still more attainable by men than women. Ethnic organisations appear to follow a similar pattern to the political parties in terms of gender make-up, with very few women actively involved in activities at the level of decision-making.

²⁶ The young son of the Limbu family I lived with in one village spent many a meal time asking why his mother and I could eat eggs and he could not and listing all the other people who could eat chicken when he couldn't. The particular sub-group of Limbus that he and his father were from could not eat chicken or egg, yet that of his mother could.

disproportionate number of high caste Hindu teaching staff in schools and the under-representation of teachers from local ethnic groups. This situation contributed to many parents' feelings of unease about visiting the school. A few expressed concern about the language difficulties they could face. Others felt they would not be listened to by the teachers as they would be seen as 'illiterate' and 'backward' by the staff.

Despite the recognition of existing inequalities, ethnicity is not widely regarded as a focus for political mobilisation. In part this is due to the formation of 'communal' parties being ruled illegal. Consequently, the institutional structure of ethnic organisations at the district level are equated with NGO-type approaches. They are presented, and are viewed by others, as project-oriented organisations, although their activities and impact are seen as of limited significance in relation to the range of other projects being implemented in Dhankuta. Thus, they provide neither the necessary assistance to advance through the existing system nor a clear alternative route of progression 'outwards'. Advancement within the current state parameters remain the primary interest of members of ethnic groups, as highlighted by their desire for their children to be educated and to gain a job in the bureaucracy or with a 'project'. Political party structures thus remain the primary route through which to make connections and open opportunities for advancement. Indeed, such a reliance on party structures is actually confirmed by the personal histories of many of the people who are now leaders of ethnic organisations, people who have gained their influence and their experience of lobbying through involvement in the mainstream political parties.²⁷

This is not to rule out the possibility of ethnic-based activism gaining broad-based appeal in the future. Concern is increasingly being raised about the actions (and inaction) of political parties at the national and district level, with complaints about alleged corruption and lack of commitment of politicians frequently cited. Whether ethnic organisations can offer an alternative to this is, however, questionable, given their current status as 'social' organisations rather than political parties. It is important to recall, however, that students currently enrolled are often only the first or second generation of a family to be given a formal education. Many still believe that schooling will lead to employment and enhanced social status. However, as more young people reach the end of their school careers and are unable to find jobs or continue on to college or university, it is likely that levels of resentment and dissatisfaction with the existing structures for influence and political

participation will continue to grow. Current evidence appears to suggest that this resentment will not necessarily increase interest in the process of incremental change advocated by the ethnic organisations. Rather, it seems to be pushing people towards more radical organisations, offering new mechanisms for change as well as visions of a more egalitarian future, as will be explored below in the discussion of the Maoist movement and its influence in schools.²⁸

Challenging the Political State: Schools as a Site of the ‘People’s War’

Since 1996 a particularly pointed, and frequently violent, challenge to the political state has emerged in the form of the ‘People’s War’ declared by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist).²⁹ This movement is far more direct in its opposition to the current construction of the Nepali state, and more forceful in its demands for change. Demands include the reconstituting of Nepal as a republic, the construction of an interim government to oversee this transition and a rewriting of the Constitution. As Gellner notes, “there is, for some, an inescapable logic to continuing the series of revolutions (1951, 1980, 1990) and carrying out one further revolution that would sweep away the rich exploiters altogether” (2001: 7). Estimates of the number of people killed since February 1996 vary considerably. In mid-2001 the official figures stood at around 1,800, while Gellner suggested that over 3,000 may have died at the hands of either the Maoists or the police (Gellner 2001: 1). Attacks and reprisals since a State of Emergency was imposed in November 2001 have further increased this figure — the BBC estimates that around 4,000 people have been killed over the last six years (www.news.bbc.co.uk: 17/5/02). Particularly violent attacks have been made on institutions seen to symbolise the dimensions of the state to which the Maoists are opposed, and those which are most likely to shake the administration and challenge the status quo. These include the police, members of the ruling Nepali Congress Party, foreign-affiliated companies and both government and private schools. In Dhankuta, a district considered to be relatively ‘safe’, police posts were fire bombed, explosive devices detonated at the telecommunications office and other district administrative offices, money extorted from businesses and teachers, and property attacked. In a particularly brutal attack an elderly

²⁷ And political parties do appear to at least be paying lip service to ethnic issues, emphasising these dimensions of their manifestos in ethnic-dominated areas and giving the party ticket to ethnic candidates in relevant constituencies (Hacchetu 2000).

²⁸ The links between the more extreme ethnic-based organisations and the Maoists are increasing, with the Khumbuwan Liberation Front and the Kirat Liberation Front launching a number of attacks with Maoist support, including an attack on a micro-hydro plant in Bhojpur in January 2002.

²⁹ The CPN (Maoist) has been demanding that the country be declared a Republic since 1990. Since the Party went underground in 1996, this has been more vociferously advocated. Maharjan (2000) provides a history of the movement and discusses the government responses to the ‘People’s War’.

man, who, as a *panchayat* leader, had allegedly ordered the massacre of a number of students in the 1980 pro-democracy uprising, was dragged from his home and hacked to death with *khukuris* by a group of Maoists. Such attacks both shake the sense of security and order of community relations and attempt to situate the Maoists on the side of 'the people' in opposition to more powerful local and national elites.³⁰

Parallels with the *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) movement in Peru have been posited by commentators attempting to understand the appeal of the Nepali insurgency. In particular, similarities in the countries' ecology, their violent histories, the linguistic and ethnic diversity of their populations and the discrimination and disparities in the geographical distribution of the benefits of development have been pointed to as factors potentially contributing to the rise of the guerrilla movements (c.f. Nickson 1992, Gellner 2001). There are also more direct links between the movements, with the current approach taken by the Nepali Maoists referred to as the 'Prachanda Path' ('Path of Truth'), incorporating the *nom de guerre* of the Maoist military leader Comrade Prachanda, with a nod towards the approach of the Shining Path. There is also evidence of support for the Shining Path by some Nepalis, with a series of demonstrations by Leftist parties organised in Kathmandu against the Peruvian government after the arrest of its leader, Abimael Guzman, in 1993 (Mikesell 1993).

A further similarity which may hold particularly significant explanatory power is the experience both countries have of "feeble economic growth combined with rapid educational advance" (Gellner 2001: 8). Stephen Mikesell makes this linkage between lack of employment opportunities for the newly-educated and the potential for revolution particularly strongly, highlighting that:

The School Leaving Certificate examinations are designed so that an extremely low proportion of the population outside of the Kathmandu Valley succeeds. Nepali education simultaneously prepares the students for bureaucratic and managerial jobs and disqualifies most of them from these jobs. As is the case in Peru as well, the educational curriculum has not been built according to the situation and conditions of the rural population ... an immense class of people is presently being schooled in Nepal to despise their own rural background. The situation is ripe and ready for the rise of movements such as the Shining Path, which provide the population with an alternative and convincing sounding 'true knowledge'. One form of absolutism and negation of social being thus can

³⁰ This is reinforced by stories of the Maoists not taking food from people and offering to pay for goods from shops (a move which sets them apart from the police, who, I was told, demand discounts on purchases), giving the impression that they are on the side of the poor and against exploitation.

easily give rise to new ones as people become disillusioned with the old unfulfilled promises of jobs, development, land reform, health for all, basic needs, etc. (Mikesell 1993: 32).

Given this tension and the significant role played by students in the earlier revolutions, it is not surprising that schools and colleges have emerged as an important site for the mobilisation of Maoist support. Indeed, with the strong connections between the state and the school, educational institutions have themselves become the focus of attacks as part of a concerted effort to challenge the existing construction of the Nepali political, administrative and national state.

A significant dynamic of the Maoist movement is its ability to encompass all groups who are opposed to the existing system. It attempts to speak to the interests and concerns of a diverse populace and provide a route for them to voice their particular concerns. A brief glance at the original list of forty demands prepared by one of the leaders of the CPN (Maoist), Baburam Bhattarai, highlights how many of the concerns raised by other groups — the ethnic activists and religious groups, for example — are encompassed in the declared aims of the Maoist movement. Demands made in the document include:

18. Nepal should be declared a secular nation.

...

20. All racial exploitation and suppression should be stopped. Where ethnic communities are in the majority, they should be allowed to form their own autonomous governments.

21. Discrimination against downtrodden and backward people should be stopped. The system of untouchability should be eliminated.

22. All languages and dialects should be given equal opportunities to prosper. The right to education in the mother-tongue up to higher levels should be guaranteed.

...

25. Regional discrimination between the hills and the *terrai* should be eliminated. Backward areas should be given regional autonomy. Rural and urban areas should be treated at par. [sic] (Bhattarai 2001).

The Maoists are, however, also able to appeal to additional groups. Women in particular have remained marginalised by the discourse and practice of mainstream political parties as well as the oppositional activities of groups such as the ethnic organisations. Even the activities of many NGO-style development organisations only selectively incorporate women

into their projects³¹ The Maoists, through the above-ground All Nepal Women's Organisation (Revolutionary) (ANWO(R)), have pushed a number of campaigns which appeal to the widespread concerns of many women, including, most notably, a drive against alcoholism.³² At the local level there is a continuing interest on the part of the Maoists in tackling issues such as gambling and drinking. In Dhankuta, for example, Maoists entered a *thungba*³³ bar where a card game was in progress and smashed all the bottles of alcohol. They then forced one of the men to eat the cards he held in his hand and took the money that was on the table, telling the assembled group that they should not be wasting their money, but should be ensuring that their wives and children have enough clothes and food. In July and August 2001 the ANWO(R) instigated an anti-drinking campaign in Chitwan and were quickly able to declare the area alcohol-free. Their campaign took on a nation-wide dimension with the decree that from 18 August 2001 alcohol sales and consumption were to be banned; that the sex trade in hotels and restaurants, including the numerous 'cabin' restaurants in Kathmandu, should be shut down; that pornographic publications should be destroyed; and that equal property rights and the reserving of 40% of government jobs for women should be introduced. The strength of the Maoist appeal is thus, in part, that it at once opens a space for direct action by women at the local level and provides a link with a wider agenda which helps legitimate and support the smaller scale exercises. Individual women are able to become involved in the movement and use it to mobilise against practices which constrain their lives in a way previously denied them.

The movement also receives tacit support among educated groups in Kathmandu. Much of the Maoist analysis of the current problems facing Nepal is seen as accurate — even by some Ministry and BPEP officials. The concern expressed over the prominent role of international agencies in government, for example, and the Maoist calls to challenge corrupt practices in the administration resonate with the concerns widely expressed by members of the educated elite. The point of disagreement, however, is the violent means being utilised by the insurgents.³⁴ Since the State of Emergency, declared in November 2001, this support has become more muted, with people anxious about being overheard speaking in support of the

³¹ Much of the work of NGOs / INGOs remains within existing paradigms of women as mothers and household providers, with literacy classes, for example, used to reinforce ideas about how to perform these roles more effectively (c.f. Robinson-Pant 2001).

³² Partly as a result of the threat of potential reprisals from the military wing of the movement, such campaigns appear to have had a more significant impact on people's behaviour than similar initiatives led by ethnic organisations.

³³ A fermented millet drink popular in the east of Nepal.

³⁴ As my Nepali teacher, who helped with the translation of some key articles, noted, "If these demands are an accurate picture of what the Maoists want, then we are all Maoists!"

Maoists. Nonetheless, a degree of affinity with their aims, if not their means, appears to remain widespread.

However, there are aspects of the Maoists' operating style which appeal to groups previously excluded from processes of decision-making and denied access to resources. This contrasts quite sharply with the approach taken by organisations which model themselves along the lines of NGOs and which remain largely within the dominant vision of development. In her comparison between the ethnic activist organisations, such as Yakthung Chumlung, and the approach taken by the (banned) ethnic-based political party the Mongol National Organisation (MNO), Hangen considers that the latter's appeal may stem from its ability to encompass people not easily brought into the sphere of the activities of the social organisations. She notes that:

Although MNO leaders and activists come from among the *thulo manche* (important people) of the village, ordinary villagers can also consider themselves to be part of the MNO and call themselves 'Mongols' — whereas they feel alienated from the social organisations with their emphasis on writings, formal speeches and cultural entrepreneurship. As one uneducated woman who supports the MNO and wasn't involved in the local Gurung organisation told me, "they probably only let people who can read or write take part in those organisations" (Hangen 2000: 77-78).

A similar argument could be made in relation to the Maoist movement, which also offers an alternative mode of participation and new mechanisms through which to influence events and gain a degree of power and influence. The participatory approaches of social organisations — including NGOs and the *janajati* groups — tend to focus on literacy as an essential component of change and a precondition for engagement in other activities. In addition, despite the participatory rhetoric, such organisations tend to be heavily dependent on inputs from outside, particularly funding, which sets up an immediate hierarchy and competition for resources and access to that external 'knowledge'. In contrast the Maoists offer the opportunity for people to take immediate, direct action, regardless of gender and literacy skills.³⁵

In addition to the substantial systemic changes demanded by the Maoists, they also posit demands which, as Devendra Parajuli, a leading activist in the ANNFSU(R) notes, are

³⁵ Marsden (2002) discusses the contrasting approaches to participation taken by the Maoists and NGOs in the Far West of Nepal, portraying the Maoists as offering a more direct form of involvement, based on action as opposed to literacy, than the more structured and formalised exercises, modelled on PRA techniques, utilised by NGOs. She notes, however, that the Maoists make use of some existing models of participation, notably the idea of forming people into user-groups.

“solvable under the current political system” (Parajuli 2000). These include a number of demands related directly to education, such as the need for education to be made free in practice, not just in rhetoric; for primary education to be provided in ethnic languages; to stop police activity in educational institutions (a reference to the way student union groups had been prevented from meeting on university campuses); and the end to foreign loans to the education sector which include unfavourable conditions (Parajuli 2000).

The Impact of Maoists in Schools

Of all the groups explored in this chapter, the Maoists are making the most coordinated and effective use of schools as part of their campaign. Schools are seen both as a site for gaining support for their activities and, as a particularly salient symbol of the state and the abuse of state power, a legitimate target of insurgency activities. As the story presented at the start of this chapter highlights, schools are an important recruiting ground for the movement, a site where disaffected young educated people can be targeted and persuaded of the importance of the Maoists’ activities and the legitimacy of their approach. Indeed, in his pronouncements on education Comrade Prachanda has recognised students “as the ‘reserve force’ in a future ‘mass uprising’” (Nepali Times 18/5/2001). The presence of the ANNFSU(R) in schools is often a precursor to more widespread Maoist activities in an area. The plastering of posters and graffiti around school premises was frequently followed by mass meetings and appeals to students and teachers for support. Initially, fairly amicable approaches were made. A number of Head-Sirs reported to me that the Maoists had come to the school to discuss their position, explain their goals and ask for teachers’ support. However in private schools or government schools where fees had been taken from students, demands for financial donations to the Maoists were made, often accompanied by threats of physical violence.

Teachers in the research area were reluctant to talk about their own experiences, fearful, perhaps, of reprisals from the police if they were found to have given money to the rebels. However, I heard many second-hand, but credible, examples from Dhankuta and other parts of the country, of often brutal attacks being made on teachers and Principals who refused to return fees or give support to the Maoists. In Dhankuta, the life of a school Principal was threatened. A gun battle between police and Maoists was reported in another government secondary school accused of charging fees. In Hetauda, a large town in the central *terrai*, rebels threatened to cut off the hand of a head teacher who refused their demands. In Kathmandu threats turned into direct action with a school principal being ‘black-faced’ and cars and buildings set on fire in cases where funds had not been returned. Countless

examples of such activities are reported from across the country, with schools appearing to be a main focus of activity as the Maoists move into new villages and districts.

There is, of course, a strong populist dimension to the Maoists' choice of schools as a site for promoting their position and challenging the state, highlighting the movement's ability to pick up on interests of the local community that are not being effectively addressed by other organisations. Demands to return school fees, a central feature of Maoist actions in schools, are thus designed to gain popular support and to situate the movement firmly on the side of 'the people' in opposition to the elitist 'state'. Other blatantly populist measures include the call for students to get 50% discount on transport costs, entry to cinemas and hospital bills and to have access to cheaper kerosene for cooking. Such moves are clearly designed to increase students' support for the movement (Parajuli 2000). Further, issues such as corruption in public office and the high cost of schooling have been the subject of much debate by the mainstream parties, but little change in practice is evident. Thus to be seen to be addressing actively these issues sets the Maoists apart from other groups.

As well as this need to gain popular legitimacy, using schools as locations for rallies and other activities also provides an opportunity to promote the broader objectives of the Maoist movement. With school integrally entwined with the state, an attack on the school can be seen as a symbolic attack on the state itself, as well as a sign of the growing strength and influence of the movement. As previous chapters have illustrated, schools have historically been a site in which a particular vision of the state has been constructed and promoted. Much of the day-to-day life of the classroom serves to reinforce that vision. Consequently, preventing the performance of such activities directly challenges existing pillars of the state's legitimacy and authority.

One of the most effective uses of schools as a tool for expanding understanding of the Maoist agenda and for highlighting the growing power of the movement has been the instigation of a series of school strikes. Some have been focused on specific locales or on specific types of school, such as the closure of private schools. Others have been country-wide displays of Maoist power, such as the week-long shut down of all schools in December 2000 and the closure of private schools in May 2001. A further shutdown was called in March 2002, to coincide with the School Leaving Certificate exams. The timing of this action demonstrated the growing strength of the Maoists and their ability to disrupt national

events, despite the State of Emergency remaining in place. At the last minute, the Maoists rescheduled the strike, allowing the SLC to go ahead.

In part, shutdowns are a means of highlighting concerns specifically related to schooling and the failure of the government to address the inadequate state of education in the country. For example, in response to claims that the December 2000 shutdown was wrong and would harm children, the ANNFSU(R) retorted that “in reality even this useless education isn’t being given to the students, and those who are able to be educated then find themselves unemployed. Will they say that if we had not called this one-week strike then their future would have been bright?” (Parajuli 2000, my translation from the Nepali). In addition, he claims, the strike was also designed to highlight wider inadequacies of the state, in particular its inability to provide security to its citizens (see Figure 3). During the shutdowns, the government promised to ensure the safety of students and teachers. This did not lessen the widespread fear of violent reprisals and schools remained closed.

A particularly potent symbol of the Maoists’ opposition to the existing model of the Nepali nation-state is the concerted effort they are making to end the practice of singing the national anthem as part of school assemblies. As the ANNFSU(R) leader argues, “It is shameful to have a national anthem which heralds some people like gods and others like devotees, and which has no mention of national pride or the natural beauty of the country” (Parajuli 2000, my translation from the Nepali). The Maoists regard the anthem as an anathema, promoting a personality cult through its exaltation of the King, a gesture that seems particularly abhorrent to a movement demanding the instigation of a republic. In an article entitled “Long Live the King” (a title particularly striking as it was published on the day of the royal massacre), the *Nepali Times* presented a translation of the anthem in order to explore the perceived problems. The lyrics include passages such as:

His Majesty, upright and solemn Nepali,
Exceptionally powerful monarch
May his Majesty always be blessed with success.
Let the Lord in Heaven grant him a long life,
Let his subjects multiply,
And let us exalt him with a hymn of love and praise
All of us Nepalis together (*Nepali Times* 1/6/01).

As part of moves to promote their republican ideals, the Maoists have been forcefully preventing the singing of the national anthem in schools. They demand instead that the

anthem be replaced with patriotic songs which present more inclusive visions of 'Nepaliness'.

Such anti-monarchy arguments have been pushed with added fervour by the Maoists in the aftermath of the massacre of members of the Royal Family at the Narayanhiti Palace on 1st June 2001, when Crown Prince Dipendra apparently gunned down most of his immediate family, including the King and Queen, after a dispute over his plan to marry Devyani Rana.³⁶ The general feeling across the country was one of shock and disbelief. People I spoke to in Dhankuta said they felt like their "lives had also been shattered" by the events, and many refused to believe the official reports, fuelling a plethora of rumours and counter-claims. These spread throughout Nepal and, through the medium of internet 'chatrooms', across the world.³⁷ Many people across the country thus resisted the state-authorised version of events and questioned the legitimacy of the new King. This concern was very visibly expressed by pictures of the old King, Birendra, being kept in place in schools and offices, rather than being replaced by the portraits of the new monarch. The Maoists took advantage of this confusion and, again displaying their populist credentials, claimed that the country had become a *de facto* republic and called for this to be formally institutionalised. As a leader of the Maoist movement, Baburam Bhattarai, explained:

A modern day Kot Parba³⁸ took place in Narayanhiti Darbar on the night of 1 June this year. Not only did this incident destroy the entire dynasty of Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, it also unexpectedly gave birth to a republic in this country (translated from an article by Baburam Bhattarai, *Rajdhani* 29/6/01 and reproduced in *Nepali Times* 13/7/00).

What is significant here is how the Maoists have made use of the public feeling, exalting the memory of the dead monarch by noting that "although Birendra had fascist tendencies, he took a very strong stand against Indian expansionist powers and safeguarded the independence and integrity of the country" (*ibid.*). This is then used to contrast with their view of the new King, whom they considered to be more of a hard-liner in his views of the insurgency. They thus presented him as being in cahoots with the Indian "imperialists".

³⁶ In the absence of any other credible accounts of events, one must accept the official version.

³⁷ Indeed, the 'chatroom' run by nepalnews.com, established to allow people to express their condolences, was shut down temporarily as it became a forum for the spread of anti-government messages and criticism of the new King, Gyanendra and his son Prince Paras. Many contributors believed that it must have been they who were responsible for the killings, not Crown Prince Dipendra.

³⁸ A reference to the massacre which brought the Ranas to power.

The Maoists' call for an end to the teaching of Sanskrit in schools also combine a challenge to the existing construction of Nepaliness with moves to gain broad-based popular support. Here they are able to 'play the ethnic card', drawing on the calls for greater recognition of ethnic diversity championed by the ethnic organisations, whilst also reinforcing their broader anti-Indian agenda. The ANNFSU(R) made this campaign a particularly central feature of their campaigns, including the extended shutdown of schools organised in December 2000. In an article explaining the reasons behind the strike, one of their leaders asked why it was considered necessary to teach Sanskrit when it is a "dead language, only understood by a tiny fraction of the population". He argued that:

making it compulsory only serves to support the pride of the high caste Hindu people. In a country like Nepal where there are so many different languages, religions and cultures, there continues to be a disregard for and a suppression of other languages in practice. Making Sanskrit compulsory in schools raises questions about the basis of national unity (Parajuli 2000, my translation from the Nepali).

In a number of cases this has extended beyond attacks on mainstream government schools teaching Sanskrit, to focus on classes run in *ashrams*. Reports from a district in west Nepal described how Maoists disrupted Sanskrit classes in an ashram, forced the Principal to issue transfer certificates so that students could enrol at another school and then closed down the school (from an Editorial in *Kantipur* 24/9/01, reproduced in *Nepali Times* 28/9/01).

A strong undertone to this anti-Sanskrit drive is a broader interest in challenging the influence of India in many aspects of daily life in Nepal, from national politics to the running of schools.³⁹ Such a concern finds expression in the form of attacks on schools run by Indians and demands that Indian teachers resign from teaching in schools. Indeed, attacks on schools in Kathmandu have particularly focused on those with Indian Principals or owners. The *Nepali Times* reported that, during the May 2001 actions, armed students:

... attacked in broad daylight two private schools with Indian affiliations. They vandalised property, set vehicles on fire, doused one Principal with kerosene and physically abused another. 'This government does not listen, so as a warning, we had to carry out attacks on schools that are run with foreign capital,' said the General Secretary of the pro-Maoist union" (*Nepali Times* 18/5/01).

³⁹ The Maoists demand, for example, the return of disputed lands along the Indo-Nepal border and a repealing of the Mahakali Treaty, which they believe 'allows Indian imperialist monopoly over Nepal's water resources'. There is also a call for examples of 'imperialist culture', such as "vulgar Hindi films" to be banned (Bhattarai 2001).

As well as being against 'Indian-influenced' education, the Maoists also focus attention on Western influences on Nepali education, particularly in the form of external funding and the impact that the current emphasis on 'English boarding school' education is having on the commercialisation of schooling. The Maoists' leadership has expressed concern about the imperialist nature of external assistance in general and a number of international NGOs and other externally-funded initiatives have had their work curtailed by the insurgents. The sphere of education is considered a particularly sensitive area, on the grounds that foreign involvement will lead to less emphasis being placed on the needs of Nepal⁴⁰. It is worth returning again to the views of Devendra Parajuli of the ANNFSU(R). He asks:

Is it 'quality education' to have this free, Western culture put into immature children's minds?... What does it teach a child if they are punished for just speaking Nepali in the school grounds? Quality education should be to encourage students to develop the ability to understand and develop or change the country... Children now don't even know about their parents' problems and are selfish and self-centred and dependent on others. It is the education environment which makes children like this (Parajuli 2000, my translation from the Nepali).

At the district level this concern with foreign involvement in schools was most openly expressed through opposition to the involvement of foreign volunteer teachers working in schools. During the period of fieldwork, a number of American Peace Corps volunteers were reassigned to schools in east Nepal after being ordered out of schools in the west of the country by the Maoists. Towards the end of my period of research, as the Maoist presence increased in this area, these postings too came under threat. One school in Dhankuta became a particular focus for Maoist actions, as the volunteer assigned here had given her students Western names which they had to use during English language class. Threatening letters were sent to the teachers and a booby-trap bomb was placed in the school. At this point the volunteer was asked to leave by the Head-Sir and requests made to Peace Corps and other agencies that no other foreigners should visit the school.⁴¹

At the national level the ANNFSU(R) single out the World Bank and IMF as particularly imperialist ('*saamraajyabaadi*') organisations, whose policies they believe are "destroying the individuality of the country" as they use the same pattern for education reform in all countries. They are not, then, focusing on the specific needs of Nepal. The call "to stop this

⁴⁰ Schools run by the organisation SOS Children's Villages were attacked and closed by the Maoists according to reports on Nepalnews.com (20/5/02).

⁴¹ Of course, this increased activity also made it difficult for me to complete my research in a number of areas, indeed I decided not to return to one village after hearing of a shoot-out in the school.

foreign interference in education and stop the loans which have unreasonable conditions” (Parajuli 2000, my translation) was one of the key demands taken by the Student Union to a series of talks that were held with the Ministry of Education in December 2000. One of the dimensions of IMF and World Bank support that the Maoists particularly opposed was their interest in privatisation. Concern was expressed about the way these organisations were “instructing the government to privatise education and make it like a business in the name of ‘freedom of choice’” (Parajuli 2000, my translation). As was noted above, the Maoists are in part opposed to the Western-style culture promoted through boarding schools, but this opposition is also due to the considerable inequality that this dual system is generating. At present there is a dramatic divide in terms of the quality of schooling being provided, a situation which significantly disadvantages children attending government schools when it comes to completing School Leaving Certificate exams:⁴²

If government schools had good facilities and were providing a high quality education then there would be less demand for private schools, and less scope for profit-oriented business men to open schools. Currently opening ‘boarding schools’ seems to be the dream business (*sapanako byaapaar*), with middle class people feeling compelled to send their children to private schools if they wish to give them a chance of a good education (Parajuli 2000, my translation from the Nepali).

In Maoist controlled areas, private schools are being handed over to the management of the community as a step towards the reform of the schooling system. This is not, however, seen as the ideal form of management of the education system, rather as a temporary measure before schooling is re-nationalised. As Baburam Bhattarai has stated “the old reactionary system must be demolished [in order to build] anything new and progressive” (cited in *Nepali Times* 18/5/01). Schooling, from the Maoists’ perspective, should be in the hands of the state (Parajuli 2000), yet the form that state takes must change. Broader changes have to be accomplished before a new model for schooling can be introduced. Indeed, Parajuli stresses that the Maoists are not asking for ‘people’s education’ immediately:

This can only be provided by a new system — we cannot ask the current system to provide this. The first stage towards this will begin when we have ‘people’s government’. The current struggle is to provide the students and parents some relief now and to give students a new awareness of the situation (Parajuli 2000, my translation from the Nepali).

⁴² As Parajuli notes, “In the current context one can see ‘unequal education’ being provided, yet ‘equal competition’ in the form of the SLC exams” (Parajuli 2000), a position which has strong resonance with Mikesell’s (1993) warning of the potential for growing unrest in Nepal.

How the Maoists wish to use schools to build an alternative vision of the Nepali state is not, therefore, clear. Their actions continue to emphasise the destructive as opposed to constructive interests of the movement.⁴³ Legitimacy is again sought, however, with recourse to the movement's external connections and its ability to enable people to participate actively in the development of Nepal. The external contacts are, in this case, with other revolutionary groups and with the ideology of Mao.⁴⁴ Connections between the CPN (Maoist) and the Shining Path in Peru have been noted (Mikesell 1993, Nickson 1992, Gellner 2001), although Comrade Prachandra acknowledges multiple external influences on the direction taken by the Nepali Maoists which arise from connections with the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM):

There was important ideological and political exchange. From the RIM Committee, we got the experience of the Communist Party of Peru, the two-line struggle there, and also the experience in Turkey, the experience in Iran, and the experience in the Philippines. We learned from the experience in Bangladesh and from some experience in Sri Lanka, and there was a South Asian conference that we participated in. At the same time we were also having direct and continuous debate with the Indian communists (from *Revolutionary Worker* 20/2/00 cited in Cross 2001: 5).

Thus, while an alternative vision of the Nepali state and of the path to development is being advocated, recourse is made to similar bases of legitimacy, with participation, increased equity and prosperity and connections with the 'external' (in this case other revolutionary movements as opposed to development agencies) used as rallying calls. The school, as a symbol of the current vision of development and the Nepali state and a site through which an alternative can be promoted, has emerged as an important focal point for the Maoists' activities.

Understanding Schools as Sites of Conflict

The above discussion has highlighted the complex networks of competing interests and visions of the Nepali nation-state which are played out in and around the site of the school.

⁴³ In areas of west Nepal the Maoists have reportedly established parallel state structures, to replace those of the government. 'People's courts' decide on the appropriate punishments to be given to people considered to have committed crimes and taxes are collected. There have even been reports of 'people's elections' being held. (*Kathmandu Post*, *Nepali Times*, various dates). Hansen & Stepputat provide examples of such 'parallel states' in the context of revolutionary movements in Eritrea, Sri Lanka and Peru (2002: 35).

⁴⁴ As the level of Maoist activity grew in Dhankuta, so, too, did people's awareness of the ideology informing the movement. Conversations turned on a number of occasions to the approach taken to Mao. Several people demonstrated considerable knowledge of the army generals directing the movement and the strategies adopted in China.

The school is utilised by various groups as an institution through which to increase their visibility in the community and gain popular legitimacy for their actions. It is used both as a site in which to mobilise support and a space through which to promote particular interests.

Historically, educational institutions have played a significant role in the political struggles over the Nepali state. Student groups, for example, influenced the course of events in 1951, 1980 and 1990. This is partly a consequence of the presence of large groups of educated young people in a context where they are able to communicate and mobilise — a situation which continues to make schools and colleges desirable recruiting grounds for support. But the significance of the school goes beyond this. Its political value is integrally linked to the widespread perception of the school as an institution connected to places and ideas considered to be ‘developed’. The school thus acts as an arena in which differing models of development are presented, as groups compete to win the support and confidence of the populace. As Gellner has noted, “The state’s prime method of legitimating itself is through development ... Development involves the state trying to mobilize people and imposing new rules” (Gellner 2001: 7). Here he is referring particularly to development as externally-supported aid, a vision which is used by groups such as the ethnic activists to help legitimate their position. Others, such as the Maoists, also use the ideas of development, but to mean rather different forms of social change to those offered by reform-oriented (as opposed to revolutionary) groups. Thus, in examining challenges to the Nepali state that take place in the space of the school, what emerges is not a straightforward model of resistance to all that the state stands for, but rather a more complex interplay between the different dimensions of the state — political, national and developmentalist.

For example, the geographical integrity of the Nepali state and the need to maintain a strong sense of being ‘Nepali’ is not questioned by the majority of groups. Indeed the need to maintain this in the face of the threat posed by India is reinforced by both the Maoists, through their opposition to Indian ‘imperialism’, and the ethnic activists who wish to define Nepal as ‘not-Hindu’ and ‘not Aryan’. The sense that a Nepali nation does, and should, exist dominates the rhetoric of these groups. What is challenged is the particular construction of ‘Nepaliness’ on offer.

The ethnic activist groups, for example, wish to push aspects of the vision of Nepal as presented in the Constitution which have not been implemented in practice, in particular the multiethnic and multilingual nature of the Nepali nation-state. In common with the Christian

groups, the ethnic activists also challenge the continued construction of the state as a 'Hindu' kingdom. The Maoists, too, wish to reconstitute Nepali nationalism in a new form, this time more dramatically. The monarchy, an important symbol of 'unity' since 1951, is to be removed from this vision. Schools as national institutions become a focus of challenges to this aspect of the state. Those dimensions of the existing vision of national identity antithetical to the groups' demands, such as the use of Nepali language, the celebrating of Hindu festivals and the veneration of the King, are resisted or even actively opposed. Similarly, while the Maoists are actively opposing the political state, in the form of multi-party democracy, and challenging aspects of the current model of Nepali national identity, they continue to utilise discourses of development as a legitimating narrative which will gain them popular support. In this case they juxtapose their actions with the failures of the existing regime to provide the promised development 'goods', highlighting the systemic difficulties (such as the role of foreign aid) as well as the practical problems of corruption and mismanagement that currently undermine the effective delivery of services.

The use of schools by groups opposed to particular aspects of the state focuses attention on the complex relationship between those offering 'resistance' and that which they seek to oppose. Even approaches which reject the dominant vision of Nepal and development have to engage directly with the key features which help define that vision. The ethnic activists therefore emphasise that they are 'not Hindu', an identifier which becomes salient as a "counter narrative of nationalism" (Bhabba 1990). A dominant cultural form, such as the current vision of the Nepali state, "at once produces and limits its own forms of counter-culture" (Williams 1977: 114). Groups have to engage with the same issues which reinforced that dominant vision in order to offer alternatives. Thus, it is very difficult for either reform or revolutionary-oriented groups to avoid engaging with the dominance of the Nepali language, the centrality of schooling to perceptions of progress, identity and intra-state relations, the connection of the state with development, and the existence of the entity 'Nepal'. As Fisher notes, the "new discourses that compete with nationalism — ethnic revivalism, Maoism, and modernism — are all brands of Nepali nationalism... in spite of all the disputes about national culture, there is an almost unquestioned agreement that a Nepali nation exists" (Fisher 2000). A call for the greater understanding of the multiple visions of the Nepali state and development promoted and challenged through schools, and the implications this has for development intervention in the education sector, forms the basis for the final, concluding discussion.

Conclusion

Acknowledging Multiple Visions of Schooling, Development and the State

“The spread in time and space of anything — claims, orders, artifacts, goods — is in the hands of people; each of these people may act in many different ways, letting the token drop, or modifying it, or deflecting it, or betraying it, or adding to it, or appropriating it [...] Instead of the transmission of the same token — simply deflected or slowed down by friction — you get ... the continuous transformation of the token” (Latour 1986: 267-8, cited in Wilson 2002: 318).

Introduction

Through this thesis the relationship between schooling, development and the Nepali state has been explored from a number of contrasting perspectives, highlighting the complex intertwining of these concepts and the contested and political use to which they have been put by various groups. There remains a degree of common ground between the positions. Groups involved in the promotion of BPEP and those who seek to challenge the existing frameworks of schooling in Nepal engage in discussions which revolve around the same central ideas, particularly the importance of schooling as a site for the promotion of individual, community and national development. Yet, despite the common language, distinctly different dialects are discernible, which significantly shift the way in which the rhetoric is utilised. The “token”, to use Latour’s terminology, is continually transformed in line with the interests of competing groups.

This concluding discussion highlights the pervasiveness of the intertwining discourses of schooling, development and the state. I emphasise the multiple interpretations and representations of these concepts which have emerged as groups situate themselves at the focal point of development efforts. I explore how these key concepts have been “translated” and re-appropriated by donors, the multiple interest groups within the administration and those organisations seeking to challenge existing practice. In doing so, space is created to explore more critically the BPEP initiative in relation to the broader context of perceptions of schooling in Nepal.

What follows is not, then, a series of recommendations for the improvement of the BPEP programme. Rather, I present a number of key issues which require further consideration by those exploring the relationship between schooling and development in the Nepali context, be that from a practitioner or academic perspective. In doing so, conceptual space is created within which to reconfigure the questions which guide externally-driven interventions.

Multiple Visions of Development

Perhaps the most striking feature of the material presented in this thesis is the pervasiveness of the rhetoric of development, how it serves as a basis for defining and negotiating identities and acts as a marker of differentiation between groups. A decade after its publication, Pigg's (1992) discussion of social representations and development in Nepal still holds much explanatory value. She juxtaposes a more generic vision of what constitutes development with the particular meanings imbued in the use of the Nepali term *bikas*:

Development might be defined as a process of social transformation ("modernization;" "empowerment") that is brought about by specific programs, projects, and policies, such as maternal health, the building of hydroelectric plants, or "meeting basic needs." At least this is the institutional self-conception of development formulated from the perspective of international agencies, policy-makers, and academics. In Nepal, development has a different, more profoundly social meaning, a meaning that weaves *bikas* into the fabric of local life and patterns Nepalese national society (Pigg 1992: 496).

Bikas, in this conception, has embedded in it "an ideology of modernization" (*ibid.*: 499), an implicit scale of social progress, which in turn is used by Nepalis to understand their relationships with each other and with the rest of the world.

These two dimensions of development are clearly discernible in how people engage with and perceive schooling. Firstly, there is a clear interest in engaging in a process of economic and material transformation. The vision of schooling as a route to greater mobility, improved economic opportunities and enhanced status is common to both the global rhetoric and the popular perception of schooling at the district and village levels. Having a school in the village was regarded by interviewees as a positive development as it meant the "end of the farming life", opening up opportunities for individual advancement through access to education. The concern widely expressed by parents that their children should become "doctors or engineers" highlights this strong interest in improving material opportunities and improving their social status. This view of the importance of the trappings of material development is further emphasised by the interest expressed by teachers in the physical

improvement of the school facilities. When asked what would most improve the school, teachers most frequently referred to the need for new buildings, as opposed to training or changes in pedagogical approach. Such a visible input would clearly mark the school out as a site of development, particularly if the building was the result of an externally-funded initiative.

This leads to the second dimension of Pigg's definition, the use of *bikas* as a marker of mobility and, specifically, a basis for differentiating between groups and places. *Bikas* in this form is a relational concept, understood in terms of the symbols of development associated with each group, individual or place and the relationship each can establish with 'the external'. To be *bikase* (developed) is to be connected with places, people or things 'other' than the local; the stronger the connections, the greater the level of *bikas*. As Pigg notes, "*bikas* comes to local areas from elsewhere; it is not produced locally" (1992: 499). It is thus both about being associated with that considered 'external' and, crucially, being more connected than others. For example, it is not just a case of going to school, but going to school when others do not that defines an individual as more or less *bikase*. This relational dynamic is particularly clearly highlighted by the way private boarding schools compete for students, with each attempting to demonstrate greater connection with ideas, people and places beyond the local. Offering English-medium instruction sets private schools apart from government institutions, as does their attention to cleanliness. Those schools with sufficient resources also employ teachers from outside the locality to boost the prestige of the school and demonstrate the opportunities for outward mobility the school offers. Teachers from the *terrai* or Kathmandu are preferable to those from Dhankuta, while those from Kalimpong or Darjeeling are even more prized. Most desirable of all is to have foreign volunteer teachers working in the school, as their presence firmly connects the school with places of greater development and thereby enhances its status.

A further dimension of how development is used and understood in the Nepali context is the extent that the rhetoric and language of the development agencies are adopted and adapted by groups. Pigg's work focuses primarily on development as modernisation; yet, as demonstrated throughout this thesis, the engagement with development rhetoric and practice is rather more nuanced than this. It is not just the 'goods' associated with development that are sought; a connection with donor agencies and with the rhetoric and practices associated with them has itself emerged as a marker of prestige and a source of legitimacy for the actions of a diverse array of groups within Nepal. It is not, then, simply a vision of

development as economic advancement and modernisation that is engaged with, but a more complex appropriation of, for example, the languages of 'participation', 'efficiency', 'transparency', 'equality' and 'decentralisation' (see also Robinson-Pant 1997: 162).

This appropriation is widely used to orient the group or organisation towards the 'external' in order to develop alternative sources of advancement and opportunity for those excluded or marginalised from existing channels of influence (e.g. the education administrative structures of the state or political parties). For example, the currently dominant rhetoric of decentralisation and partnership was adapted by members of the Dhankuta District Development Committee in a bid to persuade DFID to by-pass central government and to work directly with them. Similarly, ethnic activists advance their own interests through an engagement with the discourses of greater efficiency and transparency in the aid process and of equitable access to the 'goods' of development. In such presentations, the ethnic groups are portrayed as more egalitarian, more community-oriented and less corrupt than the high caste Hindu groups perceived to be the main administrators of development initiatives in the country. As with the DDC activities, the activist groups thus use the rhetoric of the donors to establish themselves as appropriate development 'partners' and a potential focal point of change.

The use of connections with the 'external' as a source of legitimacy for actions has taken a further intriguing twist in the current context of the Maoist insurgency. As explored in Chapter 7, the Maoist movement itself is engaging with the rhetoric of inclusion in development processes, claiming to offer direct opportunities for previously marginalised groups to become involved in development efforts. Here, however, the end vision of development is somewhat different than that presented in the agency texts, involving a more comprehensive overhaul of the political and social landscape of Nepal. Nonetheless, there is an explicit engagement with a discourse of participation and caste and gender equality, with the Maoists presented as more able to deliver on these claims than the existing donor-oriented participatory projects (Marsden 2002).

Clearly, the vision of what it means to be *bikase* is not static or fixed — the token is constantly transforming and is continually reinterpreted by groups seeking to use the 'power of development' to legitimate their activities. This is particularly saliently expressed in relation to how the Maoist insurgency has been re-presented in light of the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11th September 2001. A marked shift can be discerned in how the

activities of the Maoists are presented in the Nepali media and by the government of Nepal, with the rhetoric of a 'war on terrorism' utilised to justify the government's actions against the rebels and the declaration, in November 2001, of a State of Emergency. The Maoists have been branded "terrorists", areas where they congregate viewed as "training camps" and attacks led by the police and army presented as "air assaults", all terminology which mirrors directly that used by the United States during its military activities in Afghanistan. What it means to be developed is thus not a benign or fixed state. Rather, it is continually transformed in light of shifts in global discourses of development and the needs of groups within Nepal to legitimate action and gain popular support for their positions.

Multiple Dimensions of the State in Nepal

Similarly, attention has been drawn to the highly partial nature of the vision of the state as a unified, neutral administrative body presented in the texts of development. The language of consensus, partnership and participation which currently dominates presumes a high level of agreement between the donor and recipient agencies over the aims of any intervention. Further, it assumes that successful implementation of the proposed initiative is the primary interest of all engaged in it. Yet, in light of the experience of the implementation of BPEP, this assumption is shown to be misguided. Diverse and competing interests within and between state institutions challenge this view of a unified state oriented towards the provision of development 'goods'.

Most strikingly, as the experience of implementing District Education Planning highlighted, there is a need to acknowledge the competing interests and concerns evident among the various layers of the administrative state. District and school officials vie with the central authorities for control over resources and access to influence and power over the content of education reform. Further, there is a need to recognise dimensions of the state which are not purely administrative and the competing agendas pursued, even within the same institution. Political affiliations, for example, influenced which groups and individuals were invited to participate in planning processes and impacted on their relative voice in decision-making. What can be characterised as the national and political dimensions of the state strongly influence the daily activities and decision-making of institutions such as the education administration and schools. The state is not a monolithic entity which 'sees' the world in a uniform way (c.f. Scott 1998, Fuller & Harriss 2001). Rather, different state institutions and groups within them see and engage with the world and, indeed, other layers of 'the state' in competing and contradictory ways.

Consequently, rather than making assumptions about the role of the state, there is a need to further explore the multiplicity of ways in which the state is experienced, engaged with and, at times, challenged by groups and individuals in specific contexts¹. There is a need, for example, to understand how school inspection is experienced by school staff and how this practice shapes their engagement with the DEO. Personal or political clashes with the Resource Person may result in limited funds being made available to the school or lead to the transfer of teachers. In such cases head teachers may turn to other local and district bodies such as the VDC or DDC as a counter to the influence of the education administration. Similarly, membership of the School Management Committee or assisting in classroom construction may be the result of familial or political connections with the DEO or central authorities, rather than any specific interest in improving educational provision. Initiatives based on the participation of diverse groups in activities promoted through state institutions must, therefore, be tempered by a more nuanced understanding of what groups and individuals believe they are participating in and what interests they have in doing so.

Multiple Visions of Schooling for Development

Finally, there is a need to rethink the assumptions made about the relationship between schooling and economic and social development. In particular, the input-output focus of many of the claims made in the texts of development should be replaced by a more considered and holistic exploration of the experience of schooling. Assertions that, for example, four years of schooling improve a farmer's level of agricultural productivity (Jamison and Moock 1984), leave little scope for understanding the aspects of that experience which lead to this shift. The school remains something of a 'black box', with a child's presence in the institution ostensibly leading to the "semi-automatic" acquisition of a series of development 'goods' (King 1988: 490).

Within the social space of the school, development messages are not straightforwardly transferred from external intervention to teacher to class. Relationships and influences are far more complex than this, with a range of views of how best to maximise opportunities for social advancement intertwining and competing. The messages of the school texts must, for example, be seen in the light of the teaching / learning practices through which they are presented to children. A focus on inputs, such as whether the books have been delivered to the school or whether BPEP 'pocket boards' are utilised by staff, may provide a simple

¹ The edited volume by Fuller & Benëi (2001) offers examples of what such an exploration could entail.

checklist of things for those conducting inspections to look for. It does not, however, open up space for understanding the broader influences on learning opportunities and how children and teachers experience and respond to the school environment.

The multiplicity of messages promoted in schools take both overt and more subtle forms. The mundane, daily practices which take place in schools, serve to reinforce particular ideas and relationships and, at times, undermine the messages of the texts being taught. For example, the overt expression of national unity presented in the lesson 'We Are All One' was weakened in one class by the teacher laughing at a Rai boy who offered to demonstrate what his mother-tongue language sounded like and making jokes about his family drinking alcohol. Attitudes towards caste and gender are similarly reinforced through the relations between teachers and with students, challenging the assumption of a shared commitment to promoting Education For All on which the BPEP intervention is based.

Further messages are promoted more directly by groups seeking to gain popular legitimacy for their position. Activities of the political parties, through teacher and student unions, directly impact on the day-to-day running of the school, extending lines of patronage and division evident throughout the education administration and into the classroom. Similarly, ethnic activist groups, religious organisations and, currently, the Maoist movement seek to extend their visions of appropriate development through the site of the school. Teachers and students have, therefore, to acknowledge and address these multiple discourses and make strategic decisions on which should take precedence at any particular time. The significance of the development intervention becomes somewhat diluted in this sea of competing visions of the role of the school. Rather than pressing on with calls for the expansion of access to schooling as a development 'good', it is perhaps worth pausing to consider how schooling is experienced by children and how this impacts on their perceptions of development and the opportunities available to them after school. A more grounded exploration of actual classroom practices and the competing interests played out in the arena of the school would allow the reopening of debates foreclosed by the assumption of a consensus around the benefits of schooling.

Revisiting the BPEP Vision

Recognition of the diversity of visions of schooling, development and the Nepali state has important implications for the BPEP initiative. It calls into question, for example, the view that there is a single vision of BPEP. The programme itself is a 'token' subject to continual

transformation in light of variable and competing interests. As each group — donor agencies, central Ministry officials, district education authorities and school staff — places its own constituents at the centre of the development relationship and identifies itself as the locus of change, the way in which the BPEP initiative is defined and utilised varies. For donor agencies it has emerged as a site in which to demonstrate their ability to operationalise the partnership concept. The shared framework for implementation is the key element emphasised in the texts produced by the respective agencies and in how advisors and officials presented the programme during interviews. Throughout implementation at central, district and school levels, alternative perspectives on the impact of BPEP dominate. Within the central Ministry, BPEP has had a significant impact, with institutional restructuring introduced and national strategic planning in the field of education developed in line with the programme's proposals. Yet, despite the rhetoric of partnership and national ownership, there is a strong perception among staff in the Ministry and Department of Education that BPEP remains a largely donor-driven initiative.

Related to the current practice of promoting national ownership of the BPEP programme is an interest expressed by donors in decreasing their visibility in programme implementation, a reduction in the amount of 'flag-waving' associated with development assistance (King 1998). The shift to a sub-sector programme marks a move away from district or school level donor projects to an intervention more focused on strengthening institutional capacity at the central level. Consequently, messages are relayed to district and school staff via the Department of Education, the classrooms built under the BPEP programme do not have plaques attached to them with the names of the donors, and school furniture is not marked out by grant numbers or the names of the donor agency. In contrast, other projects maintain a strong level of visibility within Dhankuta and in the schools themselves. For example, a signboard marks the spot where GTZ are constructing a new school building, Peace Corps volunteers live and shop in the bazaar, pictures of Princess Diana and Buckingham Palace remain on the walls of several school offices as a marker of the involvement of a series of British projects in the area. The existence of these contrasting approaches to development assistance in the same district, and often in the same school, sets up an interesting basis from which to explore how the shift from a project to programme framework is understood outside the offices of Kathmandu.

Strikingly, the visibility of the donors is widely considered advantageous by officials in the District Education Office and teachers in the schools. Relations with these external

organisations are used as a way of advancing particular interests within the education administration and an association with greater 'development' is used as a means of increasing status and access to resources. The tensions between government officials considered to be aligned with either the World Bank or DANIDA and the use of District Planning exercises as a mechanism through which to establish a direct link between the district or the school and the development agencies are just two examples of the multitude of ways in which BPEP became caught up in wider power struggles. In all cases, however, it is an interest in establishing a direct link with agencies considered to be bearers of development which guides this reformulation of relations. Groups marginalised by the existing patterns of hierarchical relations within the education administration and political parties seek to open alternative paths of 'outward' communication in order to enhance their own positions. There is, then, a clear need to view the position of donor agencies and development programming as part of the socio-political 'landscape' of Nepal and to explore how this presence influences patterns of communication and influence.

In addition to the recognition of BPEP as firmly part of the 'landscape', it is imperative that the other features and influences on that landscape are also acknowledged. There is a tendency for external agencies to see their intervention as the most significant influence on educational change. Clearly, however, they are not operating in a vacuum, with other factors significantly influencing how the inputs provided by BPEP are understood and utilised. The proposed extension of the powers of the School Management Committee and introduction of Village Education Committees must, for example, be seen in relation to the party political tensions prevalent in each context. Whether these new bodies will offer alternative mechanisms for participation or allow different voices to be heard is not clear.

Concluding Remarks

The activities of development practitioners must, therefore, be considered as one factor among several contributing to social and educational change in the Nepali context, with groups offering alternative visions of development engaging in activities which impact directly on the work of the education administration and the daily activities of the school. Indeed, the significance of BPEP is relatively limited in comparison to the wider personal, political and institutional influences brought to bear on the planning and implementation of schooling activities. At the school level, for example, the personal influence of foreign volunteer teachers, direct intervention by political parties, the role of local patrons and benefactors, and the fear of Maoist reprisals have a more direct and immediate impact on the

day-to-day activities of the school. BPEP has to be seen in light of these other influences, rather than as an intervention external to and somehow separate from them.

Far from being situated above and removed from the site of intervention, the development agencies and the BPEP programme itself are deeply embedded in relationships between groups and individuals within Nepal. Donor organisations are firmly part of the 'landscape' of Nepal (Mitchell 1995). Interventions are not implemented on a blank canvas, but are inserted into an arena peopled by groups with conflicting interests and multiple visions of what forms of 'development' should be advocated. The power and influence associated with that considered 'external' and 'modern' are used to construct and legitimate interrelations between groups, establishing their relative degree of 'development'.

There is a need, then, to develop a more situated view of how the presence of external agencies is interpreted and used by diverse groups and to explore how connections with the 'outside' are embedded in everyday practices and relationships from the Ministry to the school level. Development interventions are not objective and 'above' the Nepali landscape, but are firmly situated in and intertwined with broader networks of influence, power and inequality. The challenge is thus to develop a more grounded and circumspect view of how the BPEP initiative is understood and engaged with in specific contexts, to recognise existing patterns of communication and acknowledge the multifarious, even conflicting ways in which social and educational change is envisaged. As the Nepali case demonstrates, the relationship between schooling, the state and development is highly political and is taken up and utilised to advance diverse and competing interests, often at odds with the goal of 'Education For All'.

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Mero Nepali Kitab Language Books 1-3 Janak Educational Materials Unit: Kathmandu
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Additional media sources:

Nepali Times (English language weekly)
Kathmandu Post (English language daily)
Kantipur (Nepali language daily)
 Radio Nepal

Appendix
Photographs and Figures

Photograph 1. Education Day Celebrations.

Pictures of the King and Queen provided the focal point for the inauguration ceremony of the quiz competition. The event was presided over by the SMC Chairman.



Photograph 2. Protest by teachers outside the Ministry of Education.

Teachers blocked the entrance to the Ministry and staged a sit-down protest in an adjoining street.



Photograph 4. Compiling the District Education Plan.

Resource People and DEO staff collate the data and prepare the Plan.



Photograph 5. Morning Assembly at a Government School.
Students perform military-style exercises and sing the national anthem.



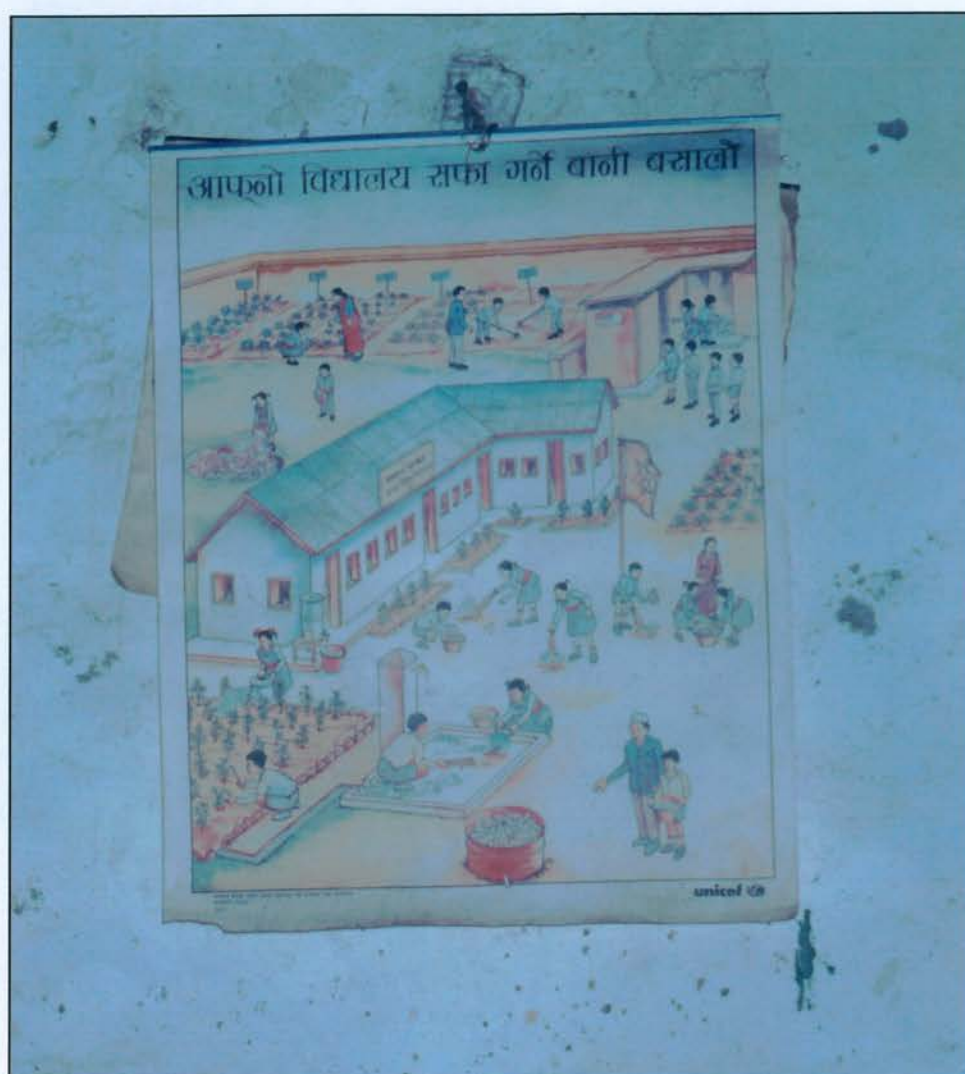
Photograph 6. 'Friday uniform.'

A private school student wears her white 'Friday uniform'. On other days of the week students wear a blue uniform that includes a tie, belt and leather shoes.



Photograph 7. 'Keep Your School Tidy.'

This UNICEF poster was displayed in many schools.



Photograph 8. 'Long Live the People's War.'
Maoist graffiti on a school building. The same slogans were written in Nepali on another wall.



Figure 1. Map of Nepal.
(Taken from NESAC 1998)

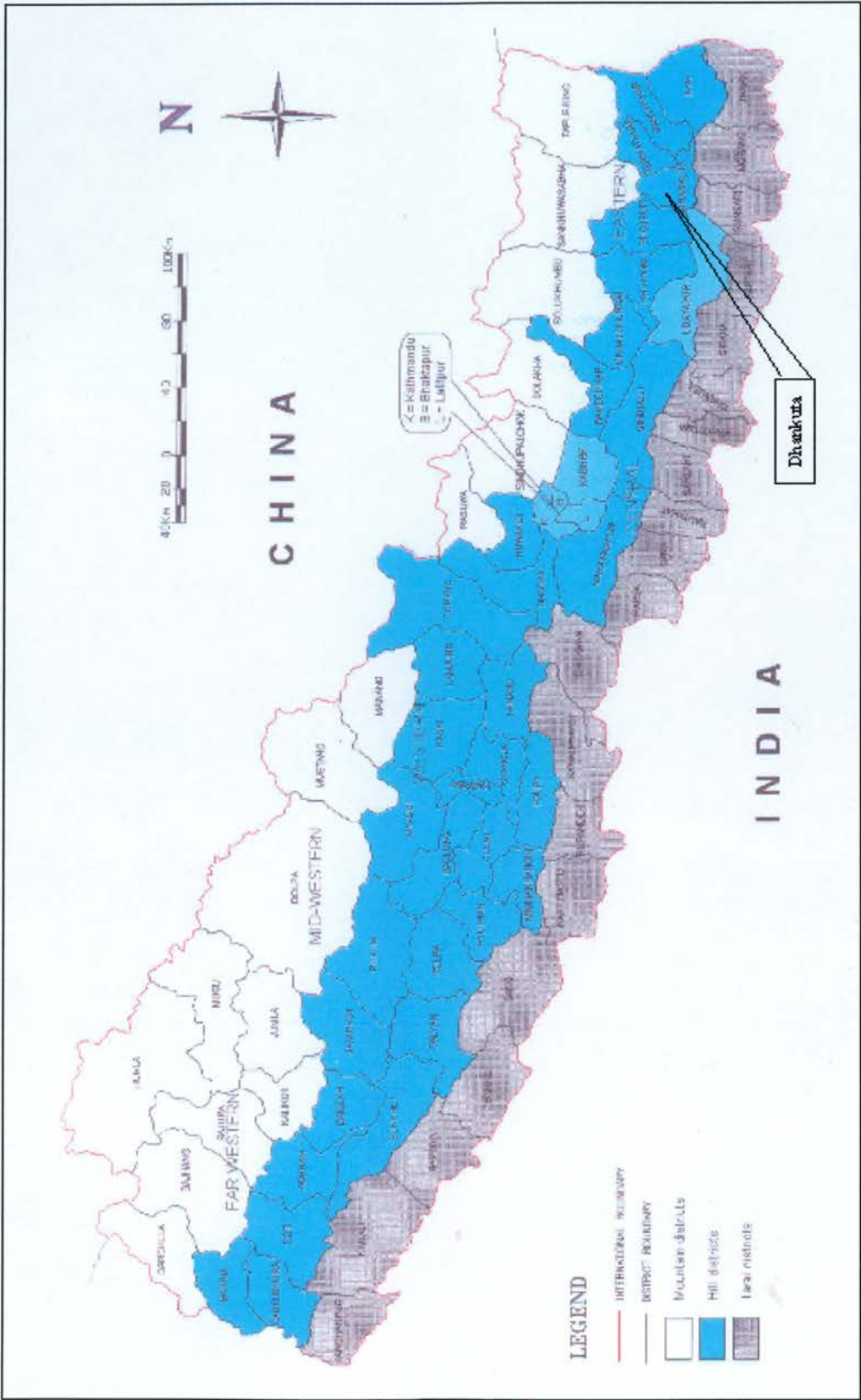


Figure 2. ‘We Are All One.’

Illustration from the Class 5 social studies textbook, *Mero Desh*.



Figure 3. ‘We Have Ensured Full Security.’

The caption reads, “Hey, Principal! Don’t worry, we have ensured full security. You can open your school”. (From *Spacetime* 10/12/00 and reproduced in *Nepali Times* 15/12/00.)

